

**UNIVERSITY OF TARTU**  
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**THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF THE CHARACTERS' IDENTITIES IN THE  
TRILOGY BY DAVID HENRY HWANG: AN INTERSECTIONAL APPROACH**

**MA thesis**

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## ABSTRACT

Considering writing literature as a cultural practice, the texts about and by the representatives of ethnic minorities serve as an interesting field of research. This thesis analyzes the social construction of identities in the trilogy of plays *FOB*, *The Dance and the Railroad*, and *Family Devotions* by an American Chinese playwright David Henry Hwang. The primary focus is to explore how different social categories, including race, ethnicity, gender, class, sexuality, generation, and language constitute the formation of the characters' identities on stage. The intersectional approach used in this thesis provides a complex discussion of these categories.

In the introduction, the research gap is identified based on the previous studies on Hwang's plays. The first chapter outlines the intersections connected to identity construction: binary oppositions in the framework of post-colonial studies, the concept of cultural hybridity, and the matrix of cultural identity. The chapter also gives an overview of Asian American issues and stereotypes within the historical context and Asian American literary tradition in the USA.

In the second chapter, the identities of the characters are explored based on the two social groups – FOB (Fresh Off the Boat immigrants) and ABC (American-born Chinese), with a focus on the representation of the different generations of immigrants and intergenerational conflicts.

The conclusion of the thesis summarizes the key findings of the present study and discusses the implications for further research.

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## INTRODUCTION

A literary text becomes “a site of cultural control, a stage on which the issues of race, gender, and culture are enacted” (Ashcroft 2012: 105) – in other words, a text serves as a cultural practice. Literature, especially written texts, have always been used by scholars to discuss the connections between the text and its cultural grounding (Ashcroft 2012: 20). From the perspective of post-colonial research, the study of identity construction, the identity’s social background, and formation, including the intersections of class, race, gender, age, sexuality, and ethnicity, can be based on a specific literary text, especially if it represents the conflict of the minorities. This paper will explore the social construction of identity in the trilogy of plays *FOB*, *The Dance and the Railroad*, and *Family Devotions* by an Asian American playwright David Henry Hwang (b. 1957).

David Henry Hwang is a contemporary American Chinese playwright; three of his works (*M. Butterfly*, *Yellow Face*, and *Soft Power*) have been nominated for the Pulitzer Prize for Drama, and his play *M. Butterfly* won a Tony Award for the best play. Hwang’s texts mainly concern the topics of Asian American voice and miscommunication between Asian Americans of different generations. These topics are the ones that have been widely researched in the framework of post-colonial studies (see Lee & Zhou 2004; Mahfouz 2012; Xu & Lee 2013; Hon-Lun & Saffle 2017).

All the plays chosen for this analysis represent the conflicts between different generations of immigrants, including FOB (Fresh Off the Boat) Chinese, ABCs which stands for American-born Chinese, and Japanese and Filipino immigrants as well. Hwang as a Chinese American playwright also refers to the experiences of Asian Americans as an ethnic minority. Some of Hwang’s plays have already been chosen as a subject for studies on identity, masculinity, and

gender. Namely, Hwang's most famous play *M. Butterfly* has been studied from different perspectives. For example, Kerr (1991) analyzes this play as a deconstruction of the opera by Puccini and the play by Belasco, an American producer and playwright who adapted the plot from the story *Madame Butterfly* by Long (1898). Kerr (1991) claims that Hwang's interpretation presents an American gaze to the Orient and Asian voice at the same time. A study by Haedicke (1992) is focused on post-structuralist methodology, and it concludes that the "gendered ground" in the text is replaced by cross-categories of racial, sexual, and class differences. Gender and ethnic stereotypes are also explored in an essay by Saal (1998), who discusses its performance in cooperation with the audience and Hwang's portrayal of sexuality, which questions the Western identity and leads to a collapse of the prescribed binaries. The deconstruction of sexual binaries in *M. Butterfly* is studied by Bak (2005), who states that there is no division into masculine and feminine in the play; yet, the deconstruction of stereotypes about East and West is also depicted in a number of reversed binaries – clothing/nakedness, homo/hetero, communism/capitalism. Hence, the aforementioned studies look at the deconstruction of prescribed binaries considering different categories that aim to question the issue of Western and Eastern identity; however, they do not attempt to analyze the construction of characters' identities based on a complex intersectional approach.

Concerning the masculinity research, Kehde (1994) compares the deconstruction of Western masculinity in Hwang's *M. Butterfly* and Greene's *The Quiet American* and suggests that the former also exposes the premises of imperialism. Another comparative study by Botelho (2009) focuses on the plays by American playwright Smith (*Fires in the Mirror* and *Twilight*) and Hwang analyzing the authors' drama as an example of a movement in American ethnic drama and theatre, which responded to the limitations of expressing the identities of others. Besides, the traditional strategies the playwrights use to question the stability of constructed identities

are also explored, namely Botelho (2009) discusses verbatim as one of such strategies. Irmischer (1998) studies the staging of masculinity in *M. Butterfly* claiming that Hwang's identification of East and West is ambiguous, and it exposes Western masculinity as a fantasy. Thus, the issue of Western masculinity in the plays by Hwang is discussed as a response to social and political events that were reflected in Asian ethnic theatre and shaped the construction of characters' identities on stage.

The research by Shin (2002) uses whiteness analysis – the method that is aimed to reveal the structures that produce the privileges of white people, “Both works [*M. Butterfly* and *Golden Gate*] dislocate moral and sexual agency from a normative white male body and offer provocations to postcolonial and queer discourses by reconceiving notions of acting and imposture” (Shin 2002: 179). A monograph *Understanding David Henry Hwang* by Boles (2013) gives a general overview of the plays of different periods focusing on Asian voice in his plays. Deaville (2017) analyzes the representation of Chinese American identity in the *Flower Drum Song* based on the intermedial analysis of the text, play, and movie, claiming that Hwang's representation has become a trial to “deflate the musical's stereotypical representation of Asian sexual identity” (Deaville 2017: 128). The interesting angle of research is also proposed by Friedman (2015) who states that drama as a genre, especially live theatre, is providing a stronger perception of ideological statements due to its direct contact with an audience; from this perspective, Hwang digs into the issues of identity and cultural miscommunication through the comic representation of characters.

Regarding the first plays of Hwang, Dong (2010) discusses the fluidity of characters' identities in the play *FOB* based on the representation of mythological characters Fa Mu Lan and Gwan Guang in the subplot. The study focuses on the development of transnational context within oppositional pairs the characters form on stage stressing that the binary between two

social groups – new immigrants and assimilated American Chinese – demonstrates the rethinking of racism. Besides, Dong (2010) notes that the *other* category – “Chineseness”, which is created by an American-born character, highlights the problem of defining and searching for the own identity by assimilated Chinese who try to fit American society by rejecting their background. Chan (2003) also explores the play *FOB* based on the category of “the politically-correct Asian” claiming that Hwang proposes “a new classification of Chinese American types” (Chan 2003: 2). The scholar claims that the play deconstructs and rethinks the Asian American experiences using games in which characters impersonate mythological heroes, thus presenting new identities; in addition, Chan (2003) points out that the category of “politically-correct Asian” is formulated mostly on racial stereotypes and marginalization.

Some of the studies (see Saal 1998; Németh 2015) also pay special attention to the techniques that are used by the Hwang to demonstrate or deconstruct the prescribed images of Asian American identities. Moreover, both the context and composition of the text analyzed are also crucial in understanding the identity (Cornell & Hartmann 2007: 13). For example, Saal (1998) points out that Hwang reaches the collapse of Western identity through the use of specific theatrical devices such as apostrophe, cross-dressing, etc. The technique of cross-dressing in the later play *Yellow Face*, namely masking “Whites as Asians”, and pushing simplistic racial definitions on stage are also investigated by Németh (2015) who concludes that racial identity is positioned as a personal individual choice. Given that the research interest towards Hwang’s plays has been mostly focused on the deconstruction of Western and Eastern binaries in the play *M. Butterfly*, and the categories of masculinity, whiteness, and marginalization, there is a need to discuss the formation of characters’ identities issue within different intersections, including the intergenerational conflicts.

The thesis aims to provide an analysis of the characteristics of Asian American identities in the three early plays by Hwang paying attention to the techniques of how the identities of characters are constructed. First, I will give an overview of the identity as a social construction based on the issue of immigrant identities and racial and ethnic intersections. Since the paper deals with the ethnic minority, Asian American issues and Asian American literary canon are also discussed. Besides, in the first chapter, I will look at the theoretical threads of intersectionality. In the second chapter, I will explore the characters of the plays based on the two social groups – FOB (Fresh Off the Boat immigrants – the characters Steve and Grace, Lone and Ma, Ama, Popo, and Di-Gou, and Robert) and ABC (American-born Chinese – Dale, Wilbur, and Jenny and Chester), paying attention to the representation of different generations of immigrants and intergenerational conflicts, as well. In the analysis presented, I will apply the intersectional framework and the terminology from social identity theories to map different categories for the construction of identities. Taking into consideration the genre and its methods for characters' presentation on stage, I will explore how Hwang constructs the identities and exposes the stereotypes about the Asian American community and how actors are supposed to perform.



## IDENTITY AND INTERSECTIONALITY

### 1.1. On Identity Construction

The post-colonial understanding of binary oppositions the Western culture is built in, which are especially applicable in the case of ethnic minorities, was developed by Edward Said (1977). Said uses the term *orientalism* to describe the Western attitude towards the *Orient*. According to Said (1977), it is the *Occident* that defines itself by the opposition to the *Orient*: while the *Orient* from the Western perspective can be seen as feminine, childish, and irrational, the West is featured as powerful, masculine, and rational, respectively. Thus, in this binary pair, the Western is defined as *strong* that is based on the opposition to the *weak Orient*. However, since this paper aims at addressing the issue of Asian American minority and identities represented within different generations of immigrants, the opposites that are considered by Said – West/East or colonizer/colonized – cannot be applied as rigid binaries. Firstly, Said (1977: 2) mentions that his *Oriental* does not cover the experiences of Chinese and Japanese minorities that this paper deals with. Besides, the concept of identity itself is more diverse that requires moving beyond the rigid binaries.

Meanwhile, the theory proposed by Bhabha (1990) is more applicable in terms of the analysis of Asian American identity in the plays written in the 1980s for the production on the American stage. The main reason is that the research on identity construction and specific stereotypes cannot be limited to the binaries of the colonizer and colonized. Bhabha (1990: 1) suggests looking *beyond* to represent the moment of transit where “space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion”. Bhabha’s (1990) understanding of identity is more complex: it is described through cultural hybridity – a concept that can be generally explained as the complex

mixture of diverse cultural influences that shape human identity. The cultural hybridity challenges the purity of cultures, both superior and inferior, and, in turn, suggests the idea of cultural interconnectedness and mixedness. Bhabha (1990: 12) also applies the concept of cultural hybridity to world literature claiming that transnational histories of immigrants and the colonized and political refugees can be the terrains of research into world literature. Based on the novels by Morrison and Gordimer, Bhabha (1990) describes the *in-between* identities of the characters that to some extent explore the *interpersonal reality* (p. 17); thus, the concept of cultural hybridity allows to look at the characters' identities within different intersections or, in other words, to move beyond the binaries and include multiple social categories.

Spencer (2006) analyzes the concepts of *other* and *otherness* within the matrix of identity stating that *otherness* is recognized based on the clusters such as skin color, clothing, location, and cultural practices. As for a definition of *other*, the scholar frames it as a metaphysical concept – “an alien subjectivity, a being who exhibits characteristics notably different from our own, whether gender, race, class, custom or behavior” (Spencer 2006: 8). It is also highlighted that such social divisions are mirrored and reproduced by language (Spencer 2006: 9). Since the image of self-identity and *other* are usually portrayed via media, the perception of *other*, as well as the creation of *self*, are mostly influenced and reproduced through language.

Regarding the portrayal of ethnicity and race, Spencer (2006) notes that currently their representation in media is more subtle and is mostly constructed based on cultural differences. Nevertheless, gender and national stereotypes can still constitute the formation of *other* since the latter is not a constant. According to Spencer (2006), the construction of a specific group as *other* is influenced by social and historical nation's character. In this context, Spencer (2006: 20) also comments on the phenomenon of whiteness studies claiming that “young, male, able-bodied, heterosexual, middle-class people may reap the benefits of special privileges simply by accident of

birth”. Race is considered by Spencer (2006) in relation to different intersections. For example, from the perspective of class position, race can be linked to social status (accommodation, occupation, language, or style of clothes). The scholar refers to Goldberg’s thesis that can be formulated as, “if one behaves “white”, one is seen as white” (Spencer 2006: 43). Meanwhile, ethnicity is used as a term for describing collective cultural identity (Spencer 2006: 45): while race categorizes them from outside, ethnicity is used for shared values and beliefs, “the self-definition of a group, *us*”. Spencer (2006) also points out the interaction of race and ethnicity in the sense that ethnicity, like race, can become the central domain of identity from a political perspective when a certain group is struggling for independence or political power. Even though a certain membership of people can be not operational, the fact of sharing common origins and cultural traits can be used to describe an ethnic category of this group; thus, sharing of the sense of *we-feeling* and the same interests and actions for advancing the position of the group in society makes a group an ethnic category (Spencer 2006: 46). Nevertheless, mechanisms of naming particular categories “ethnic” are also political: for example, the self-identity of Asians is complex within the national boundaries, and this category is also defined based on regional ethnic and religious divisions (Spencer 2006: 50). Hence, race and ethnicity should be considered as the factors that contribute to the social and cultural construction of identities.

Based on the ideas of the social construction of a *self* and *other* and the role of intersections of race and ethnicity in identity construction, it is important to look at the immigrant identities. De Fina (2003: 143) claims that the construction of a new identity is an important process for immigrants who should establish themselves in a new country and thus redefine their place in the host society and their position in regard to other social groups. Within the context of the U.S. that has a variety of different ethnic minorities, ethnic and racial affiliation is a central domain for a definition of membership for oneself and others for an immigrant (De Fina 2003). Ethnicity is characterized as a salient category for *self* and *other* identification for immigrants

who come to the U.S., and people are screened, categorized, and classified according to their ethnic roots (De Fina 2003). Hence, attention should also be paid to the actions and norms as well as stereotypes that are associated with the categories for the description of *self* and *other*.

In the plays chosen for the analysis, naming also serves as an indicator to distinguish the categories. Within this context, Schreiner (2019: 39) considers identity not only based on one's physical attributes but as a phenomenon that includes sexuality, a name, social class, and background, as well as "the concept developed about oneself over time". The scholar claims that to name something means to declare authority and ownership over something. Analyzing the merging of identities in Morrison's novels *Sula*, *Beloved*, and *A Mercy* based on the experience of Black female characters, Schreiner (2019) also states that the same naming of different enslaved characters serves as a link to their common identity. Concerning the intersectional analysis, Schreiner (2019) points out the importance of considering the aspects of gender, race, and class since they play the same role in the establishment of cultural ideology: in the novels analyzed, Black female characters are discriminated based on their sex, class, and race, which is expressed through over-naming and under-naming of the characters, and the intersectionality as an analytical tool allows to analyze this overlapping of discrimination.

The subject of Asian American identity within cultural and post-colonial studies has a long history of research. For example, Klein (2003) outlines the reasons why the Asian American community has become important and attracted attention during the post-war period. Klein (2003) aims at developing and expanding Said's definition of *orientalism* and explain how a culture of U.S. integration of power was created. Lee & Zhou (2004) study Asian American youth culture as a phenomenon, claiming that the research on this ethnic community was ignored for a long time apparently due to racial stereotypes. Lee & Zhou (2004) stress that there are also various types of relationships not only between Americans and assimilated Asian Americans

but also between Asian Americans of different generations: American-born youth who have already assimilated into the American culture have ambiguous feelings towards new immigrants and vice versa because of the intercultural, economic, and social discrepancies. Nevertheless, it does not mean that the assimilated American-born Asians do not longer represent the ethnic characteristics of their identities – rather, their worldview and self-representation construct a kind of hybrid identities, which can be studied based on the example of American-born Asians.

The analysis presented in this paper uses some principles of the matrix of cultural identity outlined by Spencer (2006), namely the concepts of cultural images based on race and ethnicity and the concept of *otherness*, paying attention to the clusters for recognition of *other* and hybridity of identities. Since the study deals with the issues of immigrant identities of the characters, which is influenced by the stereotypes, norms, and values of the host society, it is essential to discuss the position of Asian American minority from historical and political perspectives.

## **1.2. Asian American Minority: Historical Context and Racial Stereotypes**

From the perspective of identity studies and keeping in mind the cultural hybridity concept, Asian American minority serves as an interesting and complex case. Firstly, as Healey et al. (2019: 455) note, Asian Americans find themselves excluded and stigmatized due to a number of historical events, including an anti-Chinese campaign in California in the nineteenth century, the 1922 Supreme Court decision that declared Asian ineligible for the U.S. citizenship as well as racist reactions to the crowning of Nina Davuluri – the second Asian American to win the Miss America competition. At the same time, the establishment of the model minority stereotype allows Asian Americans to create fiction in U.S. society. Thus, this subchapter aims at giving an overview of the position of Asian American minority from the cultural and socio-political perspective.

In general, immigration from China started in the early 1800s, and it was motivated by social and economic forces (Healey et al. 2019). Many Chinese immigrants were involved in building the transcontinental railroad. However, the vigorous campaign against Chinese immigrants began, which finally resulted in placing this minority in a disadvantaged and subordinated position. In 1882, the U.S. Congress banned all immigration from China by the Chinese Exclusion Act, and this ban was lifted after World War II when China got a yearly quota of 105 immigrants due to wartime alliance with the U.S. (Healey et al. 2019: 465). Apart from the Exclusion Act of 1882, the immigration of Chinese women was prohibited even earlier – with the Page Act of 1875. Notably, the minority was male-dominated since the first immigrants were mostly Chinese male workers. Healey et al. (2019) characterize the second generation of immigrants as a *delayed* generation because of the scarcity of Chinese women. Given that American-born Chinese as well as other Asians are usually more acculturated to larger society, they tend to represent the ethnic group more effectively; hence, an insufficient number of American-born Chinese in the second generation led to even sharper isolation of the minority. The Act was officially repealed in 1943, but technically the number of immigrants was still restricted, and the Exclusion Act remained in effect (Turner 2019). Besides, the position of the Japanese American minority, which is relevant in terms of this research, was also influenced by many political events that contribute to the formation of certain racial stereotypes about this particular group and Asian American minority in general.

Regarding the first Chinese immigrants, they settled mostly in larger cities that could provide them with safety and ethnic neighborhoods (Healey et al. 2019). For instance, the first Chinatowns developed the economic and social structures that reflected traditional China, but the second-generation immigrants were already mostly “Americanized” and influenced by the larger culture. However, life in the Chinese enclaves was not always peaceful: for instance, some of the secret

societies called *tongs* contested the leadership in clan associations, which frequently resulted in so-called *Tong Wars*. This fact is worth noting since Tong Wars were widely discussed in American media, which led to the occurrence of stereotypes about Chinese Americans as exotic, mysterious, and dangerous. Inside Chinatowns, many businesses were started – for example, Chinese restaurants or laundries – but their number was insufficient to fulfill the demand of all immigrants (Healey et al. 2019). Even though this second generation of immigrants was more acculturated and tended to leave the enclaves through educational opportunities (in fact, Chinese women also pursued education) and to fit in American society, they still earned less; however, the second generation helped to position Chinese Americans as a model minority (Healey et al. 2019).

Within Asian American minority, a racist color metaphor – the yellow peril – should be mentioned since it has a longer history than the concept of model minority in the U.S. (Kawai 2006). According to Laffey (2000), in the U.S., yellow peril developed based on a fear of Asian migration at the end of the nineteenth century – Asians were perceived as a threat to the American identity. The stereotype of threatening China was also reinforced because of the Sino-Japanese war of 1894-1895, which provoked concerns about potential Asian military aggression (Turner 2019). Consequently, yellow peril was reflected in mass culture, and the stereotypes were also gender-based. For instance, Sax Rohmer, an English writer whose novels were widely popular among Americans, created the character Fu Manchu – a Chinese villain who strives to conquer the Western world and represents a threat to “White women” (Turner 2019). The character of Fu Manchu embodied an image of threatening China, which was used in American movies from 1929 to the 1930s (Turner 2019). The stereotype of threatening China was also reemerged in the late 1940s following the establishment of the PRC – People Republic of China (Turner 2019). Namely, the Acts of U.S. China policy such as trade embargo and the exclusion of the PRC from the United Nations marginalized China in the protection of American identity (Turner 2019). Interestingly, the idea of yellow peril was later

transmitted to Japanese Americans: after World War II and Pearl Harbor, many Japanese Americans were sent to detention camps since Japan was considered a threat to the U.S.

While Fu Manchu embodied the stereotype of threatening China, there was also another fictional character who stood for “model” assimilated Chinese American. In the 1920s, American writer Earl Derr Biggers created a Chinese American detective Charlie Chan, which was widely represented in American movies. Unlike the villain Fu Manchu, Charlie Chan was depicted as an Americanized asexualized character, which accepts the norms of the Western worlds and represents no danger to “White females” (Turner 2019). Nevertheless, both characters – Fu Manchu and Charlie Chan – stood for the racial stereotypes about Chinese Americans – the ideas of yellow peril, or threatening China, and the model minority, which as a stereotype was developed later.

As for the stereotype of the model minority, it is also significant within the context of racial stereotypes about Asian Americans. Firstly, model minority as a concept incorporated Chinese and Japanese Americans (Kawai 2006; Healey et al. 2019). According to Kawai (2006), the idea of model minority arose after two articles in popular American media were published in 1966 – *Success Story, Japanese-American Style* and *Success Story of One Minority in the U.S.* (the former one focused on Chinese Americans). Even though the model minority stereotype seems to be the opposite of the stereotype of yellow peril, both are inseparable. Lee (1999) claims that the myth of the model minority characterizes Asian Americans as silent and disciplined that explains the phenomenon of their success; thus, the idea of the minority, which, to some extent, positions Asian Americans in the silent and inferior role, serves mostly as the anti-stereotype of threatening China.

Notwithstanding the common stereotypes about Chinese and Japanese Americans, these two groups should be distinguished, namely on the level of generations of immigrants – the former are also depicted in the plays in this analysis. The immigration of the Japanese decreased in 1907 – in the U.S., a “gentleman’s agreement” was signed, which limited the number of immigrants from Japan



(Healey et al. 2019). Interestingly, due to the loophole, Japanese women were allowed to immigrate, but the change in immigration policy in 1920 curtailed immigration completely. Unlike the *delayed* generation of Chinese, the second generation of Japanese – Nisei – was more balanced and Americanized, respectively. Although many Japanese Americans tried to show solidarity with the U.S. after Pearl Harbor, they were still sent to the detention camps; it is also important that since Japanese Americans were mostly occupied in the agriculture sector, their lands were confiscated. Besides, detention camps in some sense blurred the gender difference – for example, traditional arranged marriages were neglected (Healey et al. 2019). Second-generation Japanese Americans as well as their children – Sansei – were compensated for detention camps in 1948. Thus, the next generations of Japanese Americans who were generally well-educated and professional also contributed to the image of the model minority within the context of American culture.

By the 1960s, Japanese Americans were already widely employed not only in ethnic enclaves but also in the primary economy; even though they tended to choose “safe” careers (e.g., pharmacy, engineering, accounting), they were placed in a relatively high status, which contributed to the image of Asian model minority. Concerning Chinese Americans, in the 1960s, many Chinese American females also got access to education, which resulted in their involvement in the job market. Comparing different ethnic minorities in the U.S., Healey et al. (2019) claim that the Asian minority was not controlled by the dominant group in terms of labor (like African or Mexican Americans, for example). Finally, Chinese and Japanese ethnic groups were urbanized and widely incorporated that allowed their representatives to start businesses and provide educational opportunities for later generations. Turner (2019) points out that starting from the end of the 1970s and throughout the 1980s, the American images of China, as well as Chinese immigrants, had changed and become more positive as “Red China was purposefully reconstructed into a less foreign and more familiar polity” (p. 141). Yet, the discourses of the Chinese threat could still be spotted in contemporary American

society. In the 1980s, U.S. universities established educational quotas that limited the number of Asian American students (Takagi 1992). Since the plays by Hwang were written in the 1980s, they also reflect cultural images of Asian immigrants within the political context.

Regarding the contemporary position of the minority, Healey et al. (2019) claim that the representatives of Asian cultures show group membership over Western individualism, and self-interest and sensitivity to the opinions of other people as well as avoidance of public humiliation. Such avoidance of public offense has also caused an absence of open confrontation with racism and ethnic prejudice: according to Chou & Feagin (2008) who conducted interviews with the representatives of Asian American minorities, many Asian immigrants believe that they can be recognized and accepted in American society if they work hard and show “compliant conformity” (p. 222). Healey et al. (2019) also state that patriarchal domination of men over women that was traditional in Asian culture is modified as a value, and its effect in new experiences of Asian Americans is no longer influential.

Due to the U.S. China policy that included the exclusion and quotas, different generations of Chinese and Japanese developed within the stereotypes. The most important racial stereotypes about Asian American minority are the concept of yellow peril, which implies the idea of threatening, foreign, and masculine Asians, and model minority that can be characterized by silent, Westernized, and feminine images. Nevertheless, these stereotypes are inseparable, and their perception can differ among the members of the community in different generations. Taking into consideration the complex representation of Asian American issues, it is important to look at the formation of Asian American literary tradition itself, which responds to the political context and represents the new types of ethnic identities of the characters.

### **1.3. Asian American Literary Tradition**

According to Adams (2008), the organization of Asian American literary tradition into periods or patterns is influenced by the changes in the racial status of Asian Americans, which, in turn, was a response to militaristic and economic relations between the U.S. and Asian countries. Nguyen (2002) also points out that the cultural images in Asian American literature are reproduced within the context of political representation that includes the issues of race and class predominantly. Asian American critical practice looks at the Asian American body as composed simultaneously through race, class, gender, and sexuality (Nguyen 2002: 6). Thus, the cultural historical approach to the literary tradition involves several stages that reflect the experiences of Asian American community within the social and political context.

Asian American literature is interrelated with the political context – the numerous changes in immigration policy contributed to its development both on the levels of genres and topics. Adams (2008) considers Asian American literature within the context of several stages. First, Asian American literature of the 1880s-1920s was influenced by the growing yellow peril stereotype. For example, the Eaton sisters and the Cold Mountain poets renegotiated the dominant relationship between national and racial groups asserting similarities and reversing the “American concept of *Otherness* in nativist, racist, and Orientalist discourses” (Adams 2008: 33). Due to the Exclusion Act and Asian discrimination as well as the strikes and protests of Asian immigrants the literature of this period appeals to American democratic rhetoric in order to question the dominant ideology and stress cross-cultural similarities. Regarding genres, the prose and poetry of the 1880s-1930s tend to emphasize realism: as an illustration, life in Asia and the U.S. apart from the stereotypes is represented in autobiographical novels (Adams 2008).

As for the period between the 1930s and 1950s, the writers respond to the historical and political changes, Pearl Harbor and Japanese internment within the context of the Japanese American minority and the communism in China in the case of the Chinese American minority, respectively. Besides,

the yellow peril stereotype still circulated in American mass culture, which led to the assumption that Asian Americans imperil the U.S. sexually, economically, and ideologically (Adams 2008). Thus, the literature of this period represents the experiences of ordinary Asian Americans influenced by economic insecurity and the war. Ethnic identity in the formation of literary canon and tradition is also pivotal: for example, in this period, it was easier for Filipino American writers to criticize the dominant ideology than for Chinese or Japanese Americans. It can be proved by the example of Carlos Bulosan, the American Filipino writer, whose ethnicity allowed him to challenge racist discrimination in his writings. At the same time, Chinese and Japanese writers' critique of predominant ideology was more disguised and less visible.

Nevertheless, in the 1960s, the identity-category of Asian American had been used to interpret the set of immigrant experiences, which also led to the establishment of Asian American studies (Koshy 1996). This period in literature is also crucial due to another change in immigration policy in 1965 when immigration legislation was liberalized and democratized. Due to that, the population of Asian Americans increased significantly, but it was predominantly immigrant. Besides, the minority itself was quite diverse: while some American-born Asians were stable financially and represented the model minority stereotype, the recent refugees faced class and racial discrimination. Regarding the literature of this period, it is marked by the occurrence of *Aiiieeeee!* (1974) – an anthology of Asian American writers and cultural nationalist critics Frank Chin, Jeffery Paul Chan, Lawson Fusao Inada, and Shawn Hsu Wong. Even though the anthology is criticized for the exclusion of many Asian experiences (for instance, feminist writings), it aims at questioning the stereotypes and resisting Asian American silence (Adams 2008). However, the cultural nationalists also embarked the *pen war* between androcentric and feminist writers – Frank Chin and Maxine Hong Kingston, specifically. The focus of this war can be characterized as a limited definition of Asian American identity that represents dominant discourses uncritically. Namely, the novel

*The Woman Warrior* by Kingston became a target of a critique by Chin due to Western feminism that was imposed on Fa Mu Lan – the main heroine of the novel (Adams 2008). It is also worth mentioning that gender and sexual identities represented in Asian American literature of the 1960s were limited – apparently, due to the historical restriction of Chinese women’s immigration by both China and the U.S. Despite the oppositional views inside the community, the texts of this period promote a critique of racism asserting Asian American identity and reconstruct Asian American historical and literary traditions, including the forms of writing critical, dramatic, folkloric, etc. (Adams 2008). Nguyen (2002: 7) also notes that 1968 forms a moment of self-articulation of the Asian American intellectuals that is concerned about a constitution of an Asian American *body politic* as “a diverse but unified group engaged in a struggle for racial equality.” By *body politic*, Nguyen (2002) means the formal entity that arises in literature when the authors use the bodies of their narrators to appeal to the nation and capital representing Asian Americans and their collective relationship. Hence, the 1960s can be considered a starting point in the formation of Asian American studies and discussion of the Asian American literary canon.

A similar tendency can also be spotted in Asian American theatre. According to Lee (2006: 7), the term *Asian American theatre* as well as *Asian American* did not exist before 1965. On the other hand, it represents one of the ethnic theatres in the U.S. that was “obsessed with portraying feelings of nostalgia accompanied by feelings of melancholia and estrangement in which the characters retreat into nostalgic past deeply rooted in their cultural roots” (Mahfouz 2012: 171). Even in the twentieth century, the Asian themes that were highlighted in different plays were popular among both European and American audiences. Yet, American Chinese theatre was a controversial and complicated phenomenon. Firstly, some stereotypical images were created by Asian Americans themselves – for example, in the 1930s the nightclub and

restaurant called *Forbidden City* in Chinatown promoted specific shows to the white audience. The club presented the characters who were adapted to American culture – for example, Chinese Frank Sinatra (Lee, 2006). Moreover, in traditional American theatre, white actors played Asian characters, which was considered common practice. According to Lee (2006: 21), neither ethnic nor cultural specificities of Asian or Asian American were considered as long as the actors “looked oriental and satisfied social preconceptions and stereotypes”. Furthermore, many Asian characters were played by white actors, and in the 1970s, it led to the Asian actors’ strikes and caused the formation of a new group of Asian American actors. Thus, before the 1980s, Asian American literature had developed anti-racist critique and aimed at the exposure of stereotypes. At the same time, some experiences of Asian American writers, especially feminist ones, were marginalized by the cultural nationalist intellectuals.

In the 1980s, due to a recent increase in immigration and the diverse status of Asian Americans, literary texts tended to negotiate the relationship between these worlds in the U.S. Apart from the critique of dominant American ideology and stereotypes, the literature appeals to the new *personalized* conflicts – between families and generation of immigrants. Adams (2008) claims that recent immigrants are often demonized by American-born Asians in the writings of the 1980s. The traumas after immigration are represented through stereotyping immigrants and sometimes comparing them to animals with a stress on their physical appearance (Adams 2008: 138). Regarding female prose, the interracial and intergenerational romance was commercially successful, which also signaled to some critics their complicity with dominant ideology (Adams 2008). Another key point concerns immigrant narratives: immigrant characters are represented through their romanticization of immigration that is associated with freedom, but the existing difficulties in the U.S. also challenge the ideological approach to immigration. Thus, Asian American literature of this period can be

marked by a shift of the central domain in its problematics: the writers switch to the experiences within the community itself, representing the intergenerational conflicts.

#### **1.4. On Intersectionality**

Intersectionality as a specific methodology arose in the late 1980s as a conceptual research framework and organizing tool (Romero 2018: 47). Intersectionality considers different intersections, such as gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, age, and discusses how these categories shape the construction of social identities with the focus on marginalized groups. First and foremost, it emerged from the studies on the experiences of Black women in anti-discrimination law, and there were many attempts to develop studying of Black feminism. For instance, the study by Lorde (1984) criticizes the idea of European *mythical norm* that defines individual differences outside the norm as deviant, providing binary oppositions such as *good/bad*, *up/down*, etc. Lorde (1984: 116) also claims that within the American context, this norm considers only white, thin, male, young, heterosexual, Christian, and financially secure people. Another significant attempt to reconsider the approach to cover Black female studies is suggested by King (1988) who addresses the multi-layered analysis based on the intersections of race, class, and gender stressing the social relations dominated by the state, economy, and culture. Collins (1990; 2000) proposes the matrix of domination that investigates the experiences of excluded individuals on three levels –personal, group (community), and social institutions. The matrix of domination as well as intersectionality are two dimensions that define the relationships between systems of oppression; intersectionality explores concrete forms of oppression such as race, gender, sexuality, and nation while the matrix of domination stands for the organization of the intersecting oppressions (Collins 2000: 18).

However, the first fundamental research into intersectionality was conducted by Crenshaw (1989; 1991) who uses the concept of intersectionality to analyze different gender and race interactions and discuss how they shape structural, political, and representational aspects of violence against Black

women. Crenshaw (1991) considers three dimensions of intersectional analysis: structural intersectionality, political intersectionality, and representational intersectionality addressing the implications of the approach towards contemporary identity studies. Within the structural facet, Crenshaw (1991) explores the subordination of women of color in terms of unemployment and immigration policy. It is reported, for example, that, unlike white women, battered black women are frequently more dependent on their spouses since they face language barriers that result in their unemployment (Crenshaw 1991). Thus, women of color are the most marginalized socially and economically (Crenshaw 1991: 1250). The structural aspect is also concerned about sexual violence since minority women also suffer from the effects of multiple subordination in terms of rape crisis services.

As for the political intersectionality, it discusses the position of women of color within two groups that pursue conflicting political agendas (Crenshaw 1991: 1252). Namely, the research compares two political discourses – racism that addresses the men of color and sexism that concerns white women. Crenshaw (1991) claims that both political agendas fail to include the experiences of women of color: even if one discourse follows the experience of Black women as a subordinate group, another aspect (racism or sexism) is usually denied. Political intersectionality also considers the issue of domestic violence: it is noted that the cases of domestic violence that consider minorities (women of color) are often interpreted selectively, which illustrates how this issue is erased by the strategic silences of antiracism and feminism (Crenshaw 1991: 1253). Besides, it is highlighted that any effort to politicize gender subordination is frequently interpreted only as a community problem, and feminist concerns ignore minority experiences too (Crenshaw 1991: 1258). For example, the strategies to increase awareness of domestic violence still position battering mostly as a minority problem; the efforts to politicize the issue consider violence as a problem of the *other*, and the issue has a chance to be politicized only in the dominant communities (Crenshaw 1991). Examining race and gender in the



context of rape, Crenshaw (1991) also suggests that intersectionality can be used to map the different ways in which race and patriarchy shape conceptualization of rape and track the marginalization of the minority group (women of color) in terms of antiracism and antirape discourses. Certain gender expectations for women are intersecting with sexualized notions of race, and Crenshaw (1991) stresses that Black women are marginalized since the theories focus mostly on the racial inequality of male agents.

The representational aspect of intersectionality focuses on the production of cultural images of marginalized groups highlighting how they disregard the intersectional interests of women of color (Crenshaw 1991). This perspective is concerned with selectivity, denial, and manipulation of Black women's bodies illustrated by the court case against rap group 2 Live Crew and the misogynistic lyrics that celebrate aggressive Black male sexuality, which was accused of obscenity. Crenshaw (1991) points out that the prosecutions of obscenity do not still take into account the interests of Black women who are directly implicated in rap. Moreover, this case also reveals that Black males are also perceived as agents of sexual violence. Wrapping up the discussion, Crenshaw (1991) also characterizes the process of categorization from the intersectional perspective: the same categorizations such as "I am Black" and "I am a person who happens to be Black" function differently depending on the political context; hence, their meanings (naming) also vary (p. 1297).

Concerning contemporary research on intersectionality, Spencer (2006: 105) highlights profound links that exist between the construction of race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality: for example, slavery and colonial regimes have developed sexualized images of certain social groups (Black or Asian females) and eroticized power relationship between colonial masters and their subjects. Within the discussion of intersectionality as a method, Romero (2018) also studies social constructionism that is focused on the means by which meaning is attached to an object or event. This approach also

investigated how individuals define the concepts of *man*, *woman*, *Black*, *immigrant*, etc. (Romero 2018: 59).

However, the intersectional approach has its limitations and challenges. For instance, Christensen & Jensen (2012) discuss two significant issues that are claimed to be omitted in the intersectional studies. The first one considers the distinction between different social categories – class, gender, race, and ethnicity function differently on structural and identity levels (Christensen & Jensen 2012: 111). The second challenge concerns the different views on the number of categories: for instance, some scholars (see Phoenix 2006) distinguish between not only class, race, and gender as social categories but also the categories of *student*, *patient*, etc. However, Christensen & Jensen (2012) stress that a number of particular categories should be selected within every specific study to make analysis feasible. MacKinnon (2013) characterizes intersectionality as a method and claims that it is focused on social forces and dynamics adding the specificity of sex and gender to race and ethnicity and vice versa. The specificity of the method is in its dynamics of variables and lines of force (MacKinnon 2013: 1024): the intersectional approach has highlighted the importance of social hierarchy that creates the experiences producing intersectional categories.

Discussing the core principles of intersectional methodology, Romero (2018) lists some significant aspects that are considered regardless of the field in which it is applied. The intersectional analysis covers multiple identities that are experienced simultaneously and are holistic (Brewer 1993); besides, these identities are constructed socially, and they interact to shape multiple dimensions of personhood (Brewer 1993; Nash 2008). It is also crucial that these multiple dimensions of identity are always present, but in different social contexts, some of them become more salient (Weber 2004; Anderson & Collins 2006). Collins (2000) and Weber (2004) stress the linking of identities to existing systems of power, and identities are characterized as being manifested in relations of dominance and subordination. Yuval-Devis (2006) explains intersectionality as a method

that seeks to understand how the embodiment of each of the identities contributes to creating individuals collectively. Since the paper deals with the representations of minority groups – Asian Americans – who are positioned as a subordinated group, the intersectional method is used to discuss the ways in which identities of characters are constructed and activated within different social settings.

## CONSTRUCTING THE IDENTITIES OF CHARACTERS: *FOB*, *THE DANCE* *AND THE RAILROAD*, AND *FAMILY DEVOTIONS*

### 2.1. Methodology

The plays were written at the beginning of the 1980s when the attitude towards Asian immigrants had been mitigated; nevertheless, hostility after World War II, as well as racial stereotypes and educational quotas, influenced the perception of immigrants in society. The action of the plays *FOB* and *Family Devotions* take place in the 1980s, and the play *The Dance and the Railroad* represents a historical event – the strike of Chinese workers during the building of the transcontinental railroad. Notably, the characters in all three plays represent different generations of immigrants, and how particular American stereotypes about Asian American minority are perceived inside the ethnic community itself. The paper pays attention to the representations and dialogues between characters since these characteristics are required to analyze the characters through their actions (Letwin et al. 2008). Besides, the discussion also covers some stylistic devices of drama as a genre, namely how they are used to depict the process of identity construction.

Regarding identity as a social construction, it is assumed that identity is concentrated on performing and recreating through concrete exchanges, discourses, and interaction between humans (De Fina et al. 2018: 266). This paper considers categories and terminology from two perspectives – identity theory (McCall & Simmons 1978) and social identity theory (Taifel 1978; Taifel & Turner 1979; Hogg et al. 1995). Both perspectives consider the social nature of the *self*, which is influenced by society (Hogg et al. 1995: 255). Stets & Burke (2000) also claim that since identity theory positions society as a differentiated but well-organized structure, the social *self* is also interpreted as an organized construct. The social categories of characters are also considered since they serve as categories. Besides, the analysis refers to the two processes within the theory – categorization, which produces group-distinctive stereotypes and assigns individuals to particular

categories, and self-enhancement that guides the social categorization processes by making comparisons between the ingroup and outgroup to favor the ingroup (Hogg et al. 1995: 260). Hogg et al. (1995) also describe self-categorization theory, which considers individuals as depersonalized and completely dependent on groups in terms of shared norms, values, stereotypes, and collective behavior; hence, human identity is adjusted to the concept of group prototypes – subjective representations of the core attributes. These principles can be applied to the analysis of ABC characters who choose the prototypes from American society and culture in the process of assimilation.

The analysis also uses some principles of a matrix of cultural identity, which is adapted by Spencer (2006) from Hall and du Gay (1977). This model suggests that cultural identity consists of five interrelated processes: representation, consumption, production, regulation, and the fifth is identity itself that serves as a central domain of the cultural practice. Besides, Spencer also claims that different aspects of the *self*, including ethnicity, gender, class, sexuality, and nationality can lead to the complex and controversial interpretation of the image of identity and its meaning “as a public-message part of an organized campaign” (Spencer 2006: 26). The concept of acculturation is also used: according to Berry (2005), acculturation is a process of cultural and psychological change that occurs after a contact between different cultural groups and their members, respectively.

As for the intersectional analysis, this paper applies the core principles of intersectional analysis to discuss the social construction and representations of identities in the trilogy by Hwang. The discussion is based on the methodology synthesized from the studies of Crenshaw 1991, Brewer 1993; Weber 2004; Anderson & Collins 2006; Yuval-Devis 2006; Nash 2008, Christensen & Jensen 2012, Romero 2018. Firstly, characters are divided into two social groups based on their immigrant status – FOB, or Fresh Off the Boat immigrants who have recently arrived in the U. S. and started the process of assimilation in the society, and ABC that stands for American-Born Chinese. The

descriptions of both FOB and ABC are extracted from the text – Hwang provides the notions at the beginning of the trilogy, and both of them are formulated by the representative of the ABC group. FOBs and ABCs are analyzed as ingroup and outgroup respectively based on the characteristics from social identity, self-categorization theories, and a matrix of cultural identity. The intersections of race, ethnicity, class, gender, age (stands for different generations), sexuality, and religion are studied. Attention is also paid to naming and labeling used in the plays based on the intersectional interpretation of these techniques as a device for indicating power relations.

## **2.2. FOB as a Social Category in the play *FOB***

The description of FOB is formulated by the representative of the ABC group – Dale – who is a second-generation Chinese American; thus, the irony in the play is created. The scene in which Dale denotes the meaning of FOB serves as a prologue, and character communicates directly to the imagined audience. Dale characterizes FOB in the following quote,

F-O-B. Fresh Off the Boat. FOB. What words can you think of that characterize the FOB? Clumsy, ugly, greasy FOB. Loud, stupid, four-eyed FOB. Big feet. Horny. Like Lenny in *Of Mice and Men*. Very Good. A literary reference. High-water pants. Floods, to be exact. Someone you wouldn't want your sister to marry. If you are a sister, someone you wouldn't want to marry. That assumes we're talking about boy FOBs, of course. But girl FOBs aren't really as... FOBish. Boy FOBs are the worst, the... pits. They are the sworn enemies of all ABC – oh, that's "American-Born Chinese" – of all ABC girls. Before an ABC girl will be seen on a Friday night with a boy FOB in Westwood, she would rather burn off her face. (He flips around the board. On the other side is written: "1. Where to Find FOBs. 2. How to Spot a FOB."). FOBs can be found in great numbers almost anywhere you happen to be, but there are some locations where they cluster in particularly large swarms. Community colleges, Chinese club discos, Asian sororities, Asian fraternities, Oriental churches, shopping malls and, of course, Bee Gee concerts. How can you spot a FOB? Look out! If you can't answer that, you might be one. (He flips back the board, reviews) F-O-B. Fresh Off the Boat. FOB.

Hwang: 1999 6-7

Hwang wraps up a quote as well as the prologue of the play with a note about American pop music, "preferably funk, rhythm and blues, or disco" (Hwang 1999: 7). This description is significant since the representative of ABC ingroup Dale considers FOB an outgroup, thus outlining multiple stereotypes about the categories of American Chinese immigrants. Dale denotes the meaning of FOB from different perspectives, including race, gender, class, and sexuality. The emphasis on gender is the most prominent since the description of FOBs as "clumsy, greasy, loud, stupid" is mainly related

to the male representatives – Dale claims that “girl FOBs aren’t really as... FOBish” (Hwang 1999: 6). The exclusion of male Chinese Americans is also highlighted in the revealing of their sexuality – they are represented as “horny” that has a connotation of constant sexual desire and possibly sexual violence towards not only female Chinese but also white females as well – this can be referenced to the yellow peril stereotype about Asian aggressive masculinity. A literary reference chosen to depict FOBs is also crucial: the character of Lenny is a slightly retarded migrant worker; thus, Dale highlights another stereotype of FOBs’ intellectual retardation.

Another aspect of FOB’s representation is their exclusion based on class: they are positioned as the ones “you wouldn’t want your sister to marry” (Hwang 1999: 6) and the ones with whom ABC girls are ashamed to go in Westwood. The class discrimination is also highlighted in the description of FOB’s clothing: they wear “high-water pants”, and this attribute is mentioned to point out not only the fact of FOB’s disparity in terms of American mass culture but also to stress the poor financial status of male representatives of this group. Besides, clothing is one of the elements that, according to Spencer (2006), functions as the cluster in recognition of *otherness*, and it also serves as a marker of generation difference. Considering the cultural representation of the group, it can be studied within the representational aspect of intersectionality. Namely, this part is described in the instructions on how to spot FOBs. The locations provided include community colleges, Chinese club discos, Asian sororities, Asian fraternities, Oriental churches, shopping malls, and Bee Gee concerts. Thus, the ABC character highlights the exclusion of the American Chinese immigrants from the mainstream cultural life of American society using locations for stereotyping of the group. The locations chosen also serve as a way of defining the FOB as a category: they are grouped around educational establishments (community colleges, Asian sororities, Asian fraternities), religious places (Oriental churches), places for consumption (shopping malls), and cultural events (Bee Gee concerts). Since Bee Gees as a music band started to lose its popularity at the end of the 1970s, the character also

shows that FOBs are not aware of the mass culture of American society. Hence, FOBs are positioned as the social group that is excluded from cultural discourse (Spencer 2006), which also highlights the category of a generation within the construction of identity.

The prologue of the play is ironic by itself: Dale as a representative of the ABC group and cultural *other* himself categorizes FOB as an outgroup based on the stereotypes, thus practicing *othering*. The category of FOB is considered an alien subject that is trying to invade the membership of assimilated Chinese Americans – ABCs. Besides, in this description, only male Chinese immigrants are considered worth talking based on race and class differences as well as on their gender and sexuality: their sexual desires are interpreted as a possible passive threat to female representatives of the ABC – the ingroup. Thus, FOB females are even more stigmatized since their voice is taken away totally. Considering the stereotypes, the attitude of ABC to FOB males reflects the concept of yellow peril in terms of threatening masculinity; notably, FOBs are positioned as a threat to Asian American females, especially ABC women, which to some extent excludes the experiences of FOB women. Moreover, FOBs are also categorized based on their exclusion from the cultural dimension of American society. The representation of *alien* cultural images that characterize the FOB group indicates that the FOB group around educational, religious, commercial, and mass culture establishments. In the plays chosen for analysis, different experiences of FOBs and their discrimination are outlined, and the social construction of this category is represented through different perspectives and stylistic devices.

### **2.2.1. Mythological Identities of Steve and Grace in *FOB***

Steve is a Chinese newcomer in his early twenties and, according to the description provided by Dale in the play's prologue, is a representative of the FOB group. At the beginning of the play, he comes to a Chinese restaurant in Torrance, California, to order a traditional Chinese pancake “bing” and meets Grace, a young female student who works at the restaurant owned by her father. Before



an actual analysis of the representation of these characters, it should be noted that the play has a subplot, which includes two mythical Chinese characters – warriors Gwan Gung and Fa Mu Lan. To some extent, this subplot serves as an interpersonal reality – a concept discussed by Bhabha (1990: 17), which stands for the social reality that appears within the poetic image as if it were in parentheses – “aesthetically distant, held back, and yet historically framed”. Fa Mu Lan who is performed by Grace is a folk heroine from the Northern and Southern dynasties era of Chinese history. In the play, however, Hwang refers to the heroine from the book by American Chinese author Maxine Hong Kingston – *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood among Ghosts*. Fa Mu Lan is represented as a female warrior who takes authority after the death of her father. Her rival is Gwan Gung who is impersonated by Steve. Historically, Gwan Gung is a Chinese general who is also considered a mythical figure in Chinese folklore. However, Hwang dismantles the mythological background referring to the character from the play *Gee, Pop* by American Chinese playwright Frank Chin. It is also interesting that Hwang picks two characters from the works of the writers who represented the pen war in Asian American literature of the 1960s. Thus, Steve and Grace impersonate two identities that can be studied within two categories. The first one stands for Chinese immigrants (from Hong Kong and Taiwan) and FOBs who experience hostile attitudes of the members of the ABC group and American society, and the second one is a couple of mythological heroes Gwan Gung and Fa Mu Lan who are used to depict their ethnic background and roots.

Naming himself a Gwan Gung, Steve claims to be a “God of warriors, writers and prostitutes” (Hwang 1999: 10). Despite a prejudiced attitude of an ABC character Dale, Steve is not portrayed as a typical FOB – Hwang uses subversion of the stereotypes. Firstly, Steve comes from a rich Hong Kong family to get an American education – this motivation reflects the experiences of new immigrants after 1965. One of the demonstrative features of wavering between identities is his knowledge of English, which Steve uses differently depending on the social situation. According to

Berry (2005), the usage of language is one of the acculturation strategies: the members of marginalized groups accept their assimilation and separation through language – they are frequently proficient in their ethnic languages but not in national ones. The usage of the language as a representative attribute of acculturation and assimilation into a new membership also reflects a political aspect and confirms a social construction of identity, which becomes salient within a specific social context (Hogg et al. 1995). When Steve enters the restaurant and meets Grace – a first-generation American Chinese student, he speaks Chinese, even though she starts a dialogue in English. After she refuses to serve a bing, Steve switches to English and speaks fluently enough to indicate his awareness of American culture. As was mentioned, he calls himself Gwan Gung in the very beginning – to show his attachment to his ethnic background and create an even bigger rift in the perception of the identity. However, when Dale, a cousin of Grace, joins them, Steve starts speaking English with a strong Chinese accent. On the one hand, such stylistic usage of language leads to miscommunication between the three characters, but on the other hand, Steve chooses this behavior pattern intentionally, which, according to Hogg et al. 1995, can be a strategy to fit the appropriate social setting and show Dale as a second-generation American his ethnic Chinese background. Steve realizes that his English that reflects the awareness of the social setting positions him in the oppressed group in the context of the conversation with American Chinese Dale. However, the character of Steve always drops the accent when appealing directly to an audience in the theatre and talking about Gwan Gung.

Yet, Steve's demonstration of his ethnic background, as well as his ethnic self-determination, are hyperbolized and ironic: firstly, Gwan Gung is an already Americanized Chinese hero, and, secondly, Steve's performance of Gwan Gung confirms racial stereotypes. For instance, he stresses his patriarchal male domination over Grace, which is depicted in the scene of their first meeting: after Grace's refusal to serve him a bing, Steve calls her "idiot girl" and acts as a superior (Hwang 1999:

9). When Grace ostensibly recognizes him as Gwan Gung and demonstrates knowledge of traditional ethnic myths about this hero, Steve shows a desire to take her out showing his pushy male dominance that does not fit into the social setting completely, “I do so because I find you worthy to be favored. Taking you out is among my highest tokens of respect” (Hwang 1999: 14-15). Besides, Steve does not realize that this ethnic figure has no sacral meaning within American society: after talking to Grace, he asks some random Asian people in the street what they know about Gwan Gung and expresses the disappointment of their “ignorance”. In one of his monologues directed to the audience, Steve as Gwan Gung complains about his *otherness* in America and failure to assimilate into a new society, which also covers the experiences of previous generations,

STEVE: I tell north, south, northeast, southwest east-eastsouth – why will you not let me enter in America? I come here five times – I raise lifetime fortune five times. Five times, I first come here, you say to me I am illegal, you return me on boat to fathers and uncles with no gold, no treasure, no fortune, no rice. I only want to come to America – come to “Mountain of Gold”. And I hate Mountain and I hate America and I hate you!

(Hwang 1999: 17)

Feeling hostility and unacceptance of his ethnic background, Steve tries to assimilate into society through education: he points out that “In the schools, in the universities, where new leaders are born, they study my ways” (Hwang 1999: 12). Appealing to Grace as a representative of the same ethnic group (Steve is impressed by her knowledge of Gwan Gung as a common ethnic value) and as a first-generation Chinese American, which is supposed to be *closer*, the character tries to establish and mobilize his ethnic identity in a group. Thus, Steve’s impersonation of Gwan Gung functions as an attempt to find the representative of the same ethnic group and social category, which, according to Spencer’s (2006) description of ethnicity, should share the common values and beliefs. Moreover, Steve’s switching in terms of language and impersonating himself as an ethnic figure can be defined as depersonalization since he is continuously trying to adapt to the different social contexts (Hogg et al. 1995). This perception of the social reality is also outlined when Steve refers to his motivation to

go to the U.S., positioning the country as a colonizer, a country in which every individual can find their social role appealing to class category:

STEVE: Yes. I will go to America. "Mei Guo." The *white ghosts* came into the harbor today. They promised that they would bring us to America, and that in America we would never want for anything. One white ghost told how the streets are paved with diamonds, how the land is so rich that pieces of gold lie on the road, and the *worker-devils* consider them too insignificant even to bend down for. They told of a land where there are no storms, no snow, but sunshine and warmth all year-round, where a man could live out in the open and feel not even discomfort from the nature around him – a *worker's paradise*. A land of gold, a mountain of wealth, a land in which a man can make his fortune and grow without wrinkles into an old age. And the white ghosts are providing free passage both ways. All we need to do is *sign a worker's contract*. Yes, I am going to America.

(Hwang 1999: 29)

However, Grace as a first-generation Chinese American is represented differently. Unlike Steve, she is not a FOB technically: she emigrated to the U.S. from Taiwan in her childhood and got educated in the U.S. At the beginning of the play, she is positioned as an assimilated Chinese American student who is aware of the racial and gender norms of American society. Besides, Grace studies Chinese American history at UCLA, which determines her role as a mediator between ethnic and racial categories. She indicates this awareness in the first scene: meeting Steve who persistently asks her to serve a bing, she formulates an understanding of racial differentiation using as an example of ethnic eating habits, "If the customer's Chinese, you insult them by giving forks. If the customer's Anglo, you starve them by not giving forks" (Hwang 1999: 9). Supporting Steve's play in Gwan Gung, Grace also indicates a gender issue through the power relations: when fighting with Steve for the tape box, she ironized on Steve's inability to confront a female, "Some warrior you are! You can't even protect a tiny box from the grasp of a woman!" (Hwang 1999: 11). However, she also demonstrates an awareness of the social category of gender within American society telling Steve about respect for women in the U.S. When Steve expresses a desire to take her out in a pushy manner, Grace points out the norms and values of the social categories in which Steve is going to assimilate, "Look – if you're going to have any kinds of relationships with women in this county, you better learn to give us some respect" (Hwang 1999: 14). In the conversation with Dale about his parents

and the challenges they encountered having arrived in the U.S., Grace highlights the issue of the marginalization of Asian female immigrants in terms of labor market too, “He [Dale’s father] was educated. Here. In America. When Mom came over, she couldn’t just quit ‘cause she was mad at her employer. It was work or starve” (Hwang 1999: 23).

Another crucial aspect to consider is Grace’s wavering between her ethnic and racially determined identities. As well as Steve, Grace appeals to an audience by telling the stories of Fa Mu Lan. Yet, a personal story of Grace as an assimilated American Chinese exposes the racial, gender, and class discrimination she had faced being in the status of a FOB,

GRACE: It’s tough trying to live in Chinatown. But it’s tough trying to live in Torrance, too. It’s true. I don’t like being alone. You know, when Mom could finally bring me to the U.S., I was already ten. But I never studied my English very hard in Taiwan, so I got moved back to the second grade. There were a few Chinese girls in the fourth grade, but they were American born, so they wouldn’t even talk to me. They’d just stay with themselves and compare how much clothes they all had, and make fun of the way we all talked. I figured I had a better chance of getting in with the white kids than with them, so in junior high, I started bleaching my hair and hanging out at the beach – you know, Chinese hair looks pretty lousy when you bleach it. After a while, I knew what beach was gonna be good on any given day, and I could tell who was coming just by his van. But the American-born Chinese, it didn’t matter to them. They just giggled and went to their own dances. Until my senior year in high school – that’s how long it took for me to get over this whole thing. One night I took Dad’s car and drove on Hollywood Boulevard, all the way from downtown to Beverly Hills, then back on Sunset. I was looking and listening – all the time with the window down, just so I’d feel like I was part of the city. And that Friday, it was – I guess – I said, “I’m lonely. And I don’t like it. I don’t like being alone.” And that was all. As soon as I said it, I felt all of the breeze – it was really cool on my face – and I heard all of the radio – and the music sounded really good, you know? So I drove home.

(Hwang 1999: 25)

In this passage, the distinction between the Asian immigrants and American-born Asians is highlighted: American-born Chinese girls do not accept the person of the same race and treat her as an *other*. Thus, the experience of Grace’s assimilation represents the tension between different generations of immigrants: even though they share the same ethnic background, the generational category is still pivotal in the formation of her identity. Moreover, it is also revealed that Grace as an immigrant was discriminated based on language and financial status.

In terms of social identity theory (Hogg et al. 1995), the process of self-enhancement is also described: Grace recalls the episodes of hair bleaching, which was aimed to assimilate into the social and ethnic category and deserve the positive attitude of their representatives. Failing

to join the community and find friends among Chinese American girls, Grace admits her loneliness, thus confirming her social *otherness*. Grace's experience of racial, ethnic, and class discrimination encourages her to recognize and approve Steve's pattern of behavior. Since she still strives to identify herself as a group member, she shares the ethnic category with Steve by impersonating Fa Mu Lan. The process of ethnic identification leads to her protecting Steve as a member of their ethnic ingroup and debunking Dale's racial stereotypes about Chinese immigrants, again appealing to the elements of clothing and educational aspect,

GRACE: People are dressing really well now – and the whole place has become really stylish – well, certainly not everybody, but the people who are well-off enough to send their kids to American colleges – they're really kinda classy. All I'm saying is that the people who are coming in now – a lot of them are different – they're already Westernized. They don't act like they're fresh off the boat.

(Hwang 1999: 31)

However, this quote also indicates that Grace considers new immigrants a subordinated group who tries to assimilate into Western society. A meeting with Steve who impersonates a mythological figure places Grace in the new social context, which again makes her wavering between different identities. Finally, she tries to determine her *self* through a game she suggests to play – a Group Story. The play itself is described by Hwang as a ritual with the elements of Chinese opera, in which Steve gradually loses his Chinese accent – thus, Hwang creates an irony subverting the ethnic cultural image and language. Encouraging two opponents from two different generations of immigrants – Steve as a representative of FOB and Dale as an American-born individual, Grace creates the situation in which her own ethnic *self* is activated – she performs Fa Mu Lan on stage, bringing Steve two traditional Chinese swords – da dao and mao – and a bing, the traditional dish he asked to serve at the beginning of the play. Thus, the characters of Steve and Grace who share the same immigrant experiences facing race, class, and gender stereotypes construct their identities through the mythological shared values creating the new social context, or interpersonal reality. However, the impersonation of ethnic heroes is ironic as Hwang highlights the theatricality of a Group Story as

well as the final fight between Gwan Gung and Fa Mu Lan. Notwithstanding their attempts to determine their *selves* through shared ethnic values, Steve and Grace still do not fit into the social contexts they live in.

### **2.2.2. Lone and Ma: The Experiences of Oppression in *The Dance and the Railroad***

Lone and Ma are Chinese immigrants who participate in building the transcontinental railroad in the nineteenth century; thus, this couple stands for the representation of the first immigrants in the U.S. Lone is twenty years old Chinese railroad worker who has lived in the U.S. for about two years while Ma is eighteen years old worker who has arrived in the U.S. a couple of weeks before. At the beginning of the play, Ma as a newcomer treats America as a land of dreams and opportunities, and he also strives to perform opera in China. To study the art of traditional dance, Ma visits Lone who is pessimistic about the strike and disappointed in the labor market.

Before the actual analysis, it is worth noting that since Lone and Ma represent the first generation of immigrants, their identities are constructed mostly in the opposition to American society and in this case dominant capitalistic ideology. Besides, the labor strike that aims at shortening the work shifts and increasing salary is the conflict in which the community of Chinese immigrants is involved. Thus, the intersections of race, ethnicity, and, most importantly, class are the main categories to consider in the analysis of their identities. Moreover, since the first generation of immigrants was male-dominated mostly due to the Page Act of 1875 that prohibited the immigration of Chinese women, the experiences of female immigrants are marginalized within the context of the play. The gender difference within the generation presented is also highlighted in a passage where Ma claims that he will have twenty wives after returning to China, which makes a female voice completely excluded from the discourse.

At the beginning of the play, Lone is practicing Chinese opera steps and firstly labels Ma an insect, when the former tries to approach him. Despite being the members of the same ethnic

community, Lone firstly denies Ma's desire to watch him practicing the steps claiming that Ma "can't expect to get in for free" (Hwang 1999: 41). Since Lone has spent in immigration almost two years, he shares the dominant capitalistic ideology implicitly requiring payment for his "job". Lone's distancing from the ethnic community is also stressed by Ma who tells Lone about the labeling of the former within the community of strikers,

MA: You gotta watch yourself. You know what they say? They call you "Prince of the Mountain." Like you're too good to spend time with them. After all, you never sing songs, never tell stories. They say you act like your spit is too clean for them, and they got ways to fix that.

(Hwang 1999: 41)

Apart from labeling that highlights Lone's exclusion, Ma conveys the threats of physical aggression such as burying Lone in the shit buckets so he will "have more to clean than your nails" or cutting Lone's tongue since he never speaks to the strikers. Here, such hyperbolized physical threats can be considered an embodiment of the yellow peril stereotype. Thus, the members of the striking community treat Lone as *other* based on behavior patterns and cultural practice (Spencer 2006), even though Lone has the same ethnic and racial background as them.

The identity of Ma as well as other Chinamen except Lone is firstly constructed within the system of power, which, according to Collins (2000) and Weber (2004), highlights the subordinated position of the community Ma belongs to. Besides, the character is to some extent depersonalized at the beginning: as a newcomer, he is completely dependent on the ethnic and class group. Ma not only shares the ideas and motivation of the strike itself – his perception of America combines an idealized treatment of it as a "land of opportunities" and a demonized image of "white devils". Labeling American employers the "white devils", Ma also stresses their ethnic and racial difference, which, according to De Fina (2003) confirms the immigrants' perception of *self* and *other* categories. For instance, after returning to China, Ma plans to perform and play the role of Gwan Gung, so for him, America is considered as a place to get power and improve his financial status,



MA: Well, I don't wanna become an "actor." That sounds terrible. I just wanna perform. Look, I'll be rich by the time I get out of here, right? By the time I go back to China, I'll ride in gold sedan chairs, with twenty wives fanning me all around. I'll give out pigs on New Year's and keep a stable of small birds to give to any woman who pleases me. And in my spare time, I'll perform.

(Hwang 1999: 44-45)

Here, Ma's identity is positioned within the context of ethnic values and traditions he is still tied to and class issues. His irrational and mythological images of America are also described in the stories about the mild winters and the American warm snow that never melts. When Lone asks how Ma knows many things after only four weeks, Ma claims that other Chinamen from the gang have told him that, and that they have been telling the stories since the beginning of the strike. Besides, Ma adds that losing money to immigrate to America is not a problem due to the End of the Year Bonus – another story that Chinese immigrants tell every newcomer that is supposed to prove the financial benefits of immigration. Within this context, the strikers form the ingroup based mainly on the class category: they construct the stereotypes – both idealized and demonized – about the outgroup (American society) and exclude the person of the same ethnicity, Lone, since the former refuses to share the same beliefs, stories, and values with them. However, notwithstanding Ma's unrealistic and mythological cultural image of the American land, his explanation of the strike's motives based on the class difference is concise,

MA: Look, Lone, I'll come up here every night – after work – I'll spend my time practicing, okay? But I'm not gonna say that they're dead. Look at them. They're on strike; dead men don't go on strike, Lone. The white devils – they try and stick us with a ten-hour day. We want a return to eight hours and also a fourteen-dollar-a-month raise. I learned the demon English – listen: "Eight hour a day good for white man, all same good for Chinaman." These are the demands of live Chinamen, Lone. Dead men don't complain.

(Hwang 1999: 49)

Here, American society is also considered within postcolonial discourse based on racial division – Ma calls American employers "white devils". For Ma, ethnic and racial intersections are central to positioning him in a community and defining *other*, which, according to De Fina (2003) is a central domain for a definition of immigrant's identity. At the same time, Lone distances from the ethnic community intentionally and within this character, Hwang uses the subversion of stereotypes. Firstly, Lone positions himself as a superior – for instance, he calls

Ma a child considering his intentions irrelevant and unrealistic. Lone also claims not to be a part of the capitalistic ideology that is accepted by other immigrants, but at the same time he is still involved in the labor market,

LONE: It's ugly to practice when the mountain has turned your muscles to ice. When my body hurts too much to come here, I look at the other Chinamen and think, "They are dead. Their muscles work only because the white man forces them. I live because I can still force my muscles to work for me." Say it. "They are dead."

(Hwang 1999: 49)

Being excluded from the ethnic community and considered an *other*, Lone's identity is constructed within his personal story of immigration that to some extent explains his skepticism about Ma's desire to perform. Lone was firstly sold to the opera company by his parents for eight years, where he experienced living in hard conditions. Then, Lone was "kidnapped" by his family and forced to go to the Gold Mountain making money for living,

LONE: I was one of the best in my class. One day, I was summoned by my master, who told me I was to go home for two days because my mother had fallen very ill and was dying. When I arrived home, Mother was standing at the door waiting, not sick at all. Her first words to me, the son away for eight years, were, "You've been playing while your village has starved. You must go to the Gold Mountain and work. I've never told anyone my story – the story of my parents' kidnapping me from school. All the time we were crossing the ocean, the last two years here—I've kept my mouth shut. To you, I finally tell it. And all you can say is, "Best of both worlds." You're a bug to me, a locust. You think you understand the dedication one must have to be in the opera? You think it's the same as working on a railroad.

(Hwang 1999: 54)

Here, Lone's character is marginalized by his own family since he was treated as a commodity – sending him to opera school first and to Gold Mountain later were aimed at getting the financial benefits. Since he does not participate in the strike, his voice is technically excluded from the immigrant and employment discourses, which can be considered within the structural dimension of intersectionality. The personal story of Lone also exposes why he is prejudiced towards Ma at the beginning: Ma treats the opera training as a commodity. It can be the reason why Lone labels Ma an insect and later asks him to play a duck and a locust instead of performing Gwan Gung. Besides, when both characters impersonate animals while training, they also embody the stereotypes about immigrants who are associated with animals (Adams 2008), or inferior human beings, whose identities are incomplete outside the community they

belong to. It also can be proved by the episode in which Lone continues to ask Ma whether he is a Chinaman or a duck pointing out his ethnic determination of *self*. By such change of form, Hwang challenges the fluidity of an immigrant's identity that is dependent on the social contexts.

It is also interesting that to check Ma's dedication, Lone asks him to perform a locust claiming that locusts cause famines, starve babies, destroy villages and "always trouble people, if not, we'd feel useless" (Hwang 1999: 53). When Ma refuses to do that since he "was not born to be an animal", Lone stresses that he was not born to work on the railroad either. Thus, the character of Lone draws a parallel between locusts and immigrant workers who present a threat to humans (an embodiment of threatening China stereotype) and whose identity is constructed only within a community of other workers.

Nevertheless, Lone shares the sense of *we-feeling* with Ma when he recognizes the success of the strike. According to Spencer (2006), the advancement of the group in society through sharing the sense of *we-feeling* and the same actions makes a group an ethnic category. Hence, when Lone discovers the news on the strike, he *allows* Ma to perform Gwan Gung; however, after impersonating a locust, Ma is no longer interested in performing this role. Instead, he offers to perform an opera about himself, thus reconstructing his own story on stage. It is also worth noting that Ma already distances himself from the traditional cultural practice and highlights that his performance as an immigrant will not be traditional, "Lone, you gotta figure any way I could do Gwan Gung wasn't gonna be traditional anyway" (Hwang 1999: 59). Here, Ma's character is constructed based on cultural hybridity, which implies the interconnectedness of the superior and inferior – Ma as an immigrant has already accepted the features of another culture, so his performance of Gwan Gung differs from the traditional ethnic images.

Hwang represents the characters' performance ironically – Lone and Ma mock Chinese opera style. Ma starts the opera from his story of immigration based on economic reason, “I am Ma. Yesterday, I was kicked out of my house by my three elder brothers, calling me the lazy dreamer of the family” (Hwang 1999: 59). At the same time, Lone performs a Fleaman – the poorest beggar in the village whose character stands for the representation of the lower class of Chinese. Again, Hwang chooses an animal, an insect, to construct the identity based on the class category: firstly, Ma even calls Lone's character a *Flea* succeeding to call him a *Fleaman* from the third attempt. The low financial status is also depicted ironically – Fleaman claims that it is hard to find housing for fleas and “even the fleas are thinking of moving north” (Hwang 1999: 60), thus referring to immigrants' motivation. The characters' treatment of Americans is also constructed based on racial stereotypes and the binary superior/inferior: apart from labeling them as “white devils”, Lone as Fleaman also highlights the physical differences between two races, “Oh – with hair the color of a sick chicken and eyes round as eggs? The fleas and I call him Chicken-Laying-an-Egg” (Hwang 1999: 60). According to Spencer (2006), such description of physical attributes is considered as clusters for recognition of an *other*. Within this performance, the characters also demonstrate the trip on the boat, in which many immigrants die due to hard conditions, and the battle of Ma with the Gold Mountain; finally, Lone acts as a “white devil”,

LONE: I am a white devil! Listen to my stupid language: “Wha che doo doo blah blah.” Look at my wide eyes – like I have drunk seventy-two pots of tea. Look at my funny hair – twisting, turning, like a snake telling lies. Blah blah doo doo tee tee.

(Hwang 1999: 61)

The distortion of language and the usage of the Chinese accent also highlight the social divisions between the ingroup and outgroup as well as the recognition of *otherness*. The final battle ends with the Ma's victory who claim that only Chinamen can “civilize and tame the barbarians”, thus subverting the binaries of the colonizer and colonized. Nevertheless, this rigid opposition

between the superior and inferior is represented ironically since the characters of Ma and Lone are confused about how to finish the opera. Lone informs Ma that the strike of the workers is over; however, the demands of the strikers are not fulfilled completely. Lone considers the results successful since it was a decision of gang's heads.

Hence, despite being distanced from the community at the beginning, Lone is still positioned in the hierarchy – he obeys the heads of the gang – and determines himself as a member of the ethnic and class-based community. Besides, encouraging Ma to return to work, Lone's character dismantles his constructed *self*, claiming that he was wrong about the strikers and his motivation to keep training – in fact, he trains for no reason. Ma also returns to work refusing an idea to perform Gwang Gung revealing that he is more interested in staying in America and „becoming rich“. Thus, Hwang reveals the characters' identities through mock Chinese performance using an ironical subversion of post-colonial binaries.

### **2.2.3. Ama, Popo, and Di-Gou: The Religious and Ethnic Conflict in *Family Devotions***

Ama, Popo, and Di-Gou are siblings: Ama was born in China, immigrated to the Philippines, and then – to America, as well as her younger sister Popo, while Di-Gou is still a resident of P.R.C. – the People's Republic of China, even though he studied in the Columbia Medical college. The play's main conflict is centered around Di-Gou's arrival in America after the death of his wife. The identities of these three characters are interesting to discuss since although they technically share the same ethnic and generational background, the sisters Ama and Popo marginalize their brother from the family based on the religious and political categories. Hwang uses irony to depict their stereotyping images of Christianity and Chinese communism as well as post-war prejudice about Japanese Americans. Besides, Ama and Popo as American Chinese are analyzed within the racial stereotypes of yellow peril and model minority, while Di-Gou's identity is constructed based on class and ethnicity intersections.

Even though the sisters wait for Di-Gou at the beginning of the play, he is the first character who appears on stage implicitly, “As the curtain rises, we see a single spotlight on an old Chinese face and hear Chinese music or chanting. Suddenly, the music becomes modern-day funk or rock ’n’ roll, and the lights come up to reveal the set: the lanai/sunroom and backyard of a home in Bel Air” (Hwang 1999: 67); in this remark, Hwang shows the intercultural transition as well as in the first play of the trilogy *FOB*. In one of the first scenes, Ama and Popo are represented through the religious category – they are devoted Christians. Besides, Ama projects this *otherness* on Di-Gou appealing to Chinese communism, “Torture. Communists. Make him work in rice fields. In rice fields, all the people wear wires in their heads – yes! Wires force them work all day and sing Communist song!” (Hwang 1999: 69). Here, the hyperbolized images of communism ideology can be approached through Spencer’s (2006) description of the production of the cultural images that constitute the matrix of identity: the stereotype of threatening China produces images of the subordinated community in the opposition to American democracy.

Concerning the cultural images and the dimension of production, it is also worth noting that Ama and Popo as the representatives of the oldest generation in the play are prejudiced towards Japanese Americans, which is caused by the post-war American images of Japanese as a threat to society. It is depicted in their attitude to Wilbur, Popo’s son-in-law, who stands for the model minority stereotype in the play. Even though Wilbur provides financial support for the family, Ama and Popo recall the images of Japanese threat during the war,

AMA: Remember? During war? Pictures they show us? Always – Japanese men kill Chinese! In picture – Japanese kill and laugh. Sometimes – torture and laugh, too.  
POPO: Wilbur not like that! Hardly even laugh!

(Hwang 1999: 67)

Thus, they categorize Wilbur through the representational dimension based on the cultural images. Besides, Wilbur’s positioning as other is also grounded in the religious category: since he was not “taught Christianity”, he is brought up in a “bad family”. Hence, Ama and Popo

appeal to a binary between Christian and Japanese, which is also rooted in ethnic and generational categories of identity. Apart from ethnic and religious intersections that Ama and Popo use for dividing other family members into ingroup and outgroup, these characters also construct gender stereotypes based on the traditional gender roles in China. Namely, they explicitly stress the importance of a good marriage for Jenny, the youngest seventeen-year-old character who wants to get married in her thirties,

AMA: You should not use [this word ] anyplace.  
POPO: Otherwise – no good man wants marry you.  
JENNY: You mean, no rich man.  
AMA: No – money is not important.  
POPO: As long as he is good man.  
AMA: Christian.  
POPO: Chinese.  
AMA: Good education.  
POPO: Good school.  
AMA: Princeton.  
POPO: Harvard.  
AMA: Doctor.  
POPO: Surgeon.  
AMA: Brain surgeon.  
POPO: Surgeon general.  
AMA: Otherwise – you marry anyone that you like.

(Hwang 1999: 71-72)

In this passage, Ama and Popo, on the one hand, refer to the model minority stereotype, including educational and professional aspects, but, on the other hand, their treatment positions Jenny in the subordinated position based on gender exclusion – this can be analyzed within the structural aspect of intersectionality that marginalizes women socially and economically (Crenshaw 1990). Besides, Hwang ironizes about Ama and Popo's stereotyping categorization through the profession they have suggested for Jenny – the first dancing dental technician, pointing out the interrelation of model minority stereotype and ethnic gender-related occupation for a woman. Moreover, the educational aspect also considers the political intersectionality since, in the 1980s, American universities established educational quotas that limited the number of Asian students. The intergenerational conflict is also outlined through the prototype Ama and Popo refer to – it is their aunt See-goh-poh

who became the first Christian in the family. The characters position See-goh-poh as an example of the model Chinese American trying to adjust Jenny to this category, for instance, by forcing her to learn Chinese and the gospel. Thus, the stress on language, which usually highlights the social divisions for different ethnicities, and religion that are interconnected with model minority and threatening Japanese stereotypes construct the identities of Ama and Popo.

The prevailing meaning of the religious intersection is represented in Ama's and Popo's categorizing of Di-Gou too. Despite sharing the same ethnic roots, Di-Gou is characterized by them within the ideological facet of Chinese *brainwashing* communism that neglects Christianity and *family's devotions*. This is represented in the scene of meeting with Di-Gou after he arrives in the U.S. The first question sisters ask him is whether he still loves God – they place Di-Gou in their ingroup based on his participation in the first evangelism tour of See-goh-poh. Here, the misunderstanding between the siblings from the same generation is based on the intersection of religion. It is also depicted in the scene of Jenny's testimony: Popo "translates" Jenny's speech to Di-Gou claiming that he cannot understand it since he is not Christian, "You are not Christian. You need someone – like announcer at baseball game – except announce for God" (Hwang 1999: 90). Notably, Popo switches to the American cultural image – the baseball game – that can be considered within the context of cultural hybridity since her cultural references are already interconnected. However, Di-Gou claims he has lost his faith after their sisters' immigration; thus, his perception of generation as an intersection is ethnical – the family is the only ingroup through which he identifies his *self*. Di-Gou's identity is, nevertheless, also constructed based on the intersections of ethnicity and class – his racial determination is represented through the cultural images too – for instance, the Chinese diplomacy book he uses to orient in the U.S. and Chinese toys and a flag. Di-Gou also claims he had no children due to Chinese state policy, which identifies the political shaping of the identities thus



placing it in the power structure and Di-Gou's motivation to rejoin the ethnic family in order to define himself as a member of the community.

Despite the religious intersection being crucial in Ama's and Popo's shaping of *otherness*, the class issue is also outlined in their perception of Robert and Wilbur – they treat them as servants, “Ama: Don't worry. They will eat outside. In America, servants do not take over their masters' house. In China now, servants beat their masters” (Hwang 1999: 81). Here, the identities of the characters are linked to the systems of power, which are interconnected with class categories and racial stereotypes. Besides, Ama also claims she does not want to share the same place in Heaven with Robert, which is motivated by his financial background; thus, the class issue for Ama and Popo characters also shapes their definition of *otherness*. The class intersection, which includes the occupation, is highlighted in Di-Gou's phrase about China, “China is my home, my work. I had to stay there” (Hwang 1999: 85). However, Di-Gou shapes the identity based on the generations and ethnicity categories, namely he refers to faces as a mechanism of defining the *self*,

DI-GOU: There are faces back further than you can see. Faces long before the white missionaries arrived in China. Here. (He holds Chester's violin so that its back is facing Chester, and uses it like a mirror) Look here. At your face. Study your face and you will see—the shape of your face is the shape of faces back many generations – across an ocean, in another soil. You must become one with your family before you can hope to live away from it.

(Hwang 1999: 92)

Here, Di-Gou proclaims the racial distinguishment, but it is linked to the generation and ethnicity intersections as well as the Chinese historical heritage. The opposition between the three characters is represented in the ceremony of casting the *Communist devil* out of Di-Gou: Ama and Popo tie their brother on the table and force him to tell the story of his evangelism tour with See-goh-poh, “Ama: If you will not speak See-goh-poh's stories in language you know, we will punish you until you speak in tongue of fire. Your body must suffer until you speak the truth” (Hwang 1999: 97). Notably, language is again used for marking the social divisions. In response, Di-Gou grabs Chester who begins speaking in tongues interpreting Di-Gou's words,

and tells the real story of See-goh-poh claiming that she was not in the evangelism tour; instead, See-goh-poh left China to give birth to a baby who was not conceived in a marriage. Hence, Di-Gou and Chester deconstruct the myth of Ama and Popo about See-goh-poh as the first Christian, and their union as the same voice highlights their belonging to the same social category based on the generation and ethnicity. In the final battle between Di-Gou and Ama who compete in telling the family stories, Ama and Popo lose and die after Di-Gou reveals the truth,

DI-GOU: In her last moment, See-goh-poh wanted to be buried in Chinese soil, not Christian soil. You don't know. You were in the Philippines. I come to bring you back to China. Come, sisters. To the soil you've forsaken with ways born of memories, of stories that never happened. Come, sisters. The stories written on your face are the ones you must believe.

(Hwang 1999: 99)

Di-Gou eventually stresses ethnicity as the defining category of human's *self* revealing that his sisters' religious redefinition of themselves is wrong; however, Hwang ends the play with the scene in which Di-Gou leaves the family claiming that now he has realized nobody can leave American, and his only desire is to drive an American car down an American freeway. Hence, even though Di-Gou is initially represented within the generation and ethnicity categories, for which he appeals to faces as codes, Hwang places him in a new political context stressing the intercultural transition that is demonstrated at the beginning of the play.

#### **2.2.4. Robert: An Assimilated FOB in *Family Devotions***

Robert is a first-generation Chinese American who married Hannah, Popo's daughter. The experience of this character is significant as an assimilated FOB – the social status Robert proclaims by himself. Besides, in this case, it is interesting to look at the different social contexts in which Robert's identity becomes salient and the intersections that the character uses to approach the *whiteness* category. At the same time, this character is also studied within racial stereotypes about Asian American immigrants, as he encourages the construction of these

stereotypes by himself thus adjusting to the specific social category. Since, according to De Fina (2003), the immigrants have to redefine their place in the host society to establish the new identity, the character of Robert is explored based on the different elements of this redefinition, including the intersections of race, ethnicity, class, gender, and generation.

Robert's identity is constructed within self-articulation, which is combined with racial stereotypes and class categories. For instance, he identifies himself through three social constructs – a FOB (in the past), a bum, and a cosmopolitan, which can be explained as a social organized structure for defining the *self* (Stets and Burke 2000),

ROBERT: I'm not a county kid. It's not like I was that poor. I'm from Shanghai, you know. I'm cosmopolitan. So when I went to college, I just played around at first. That's the beauty of the free enterprise system, Di-gou. If you wanna be a bum, it lets you be a bum. I wasted my time, went out with all these American girls. I was just an FOB. This American girl – she talked to me – asked me out – kissed me on first date – and I thought, "Land of Opportunity!" Anyway, I decided to turn my back on China. This is my home. When I wanted to stop being a bum, make money, it let me. That's America!

(Hwang 1999: 81)

Here, the character highlights the class category pointing out his financial status and the aspect of the American economic system, which marks the social division between consumers. Besides, such treatment of the class issue positions Robert in a consumer category, which stresses the importance of consumption in the formation of the character's identity (Spencer 2006). With this in mind, it is notable that Robert to some extent outlines the model minority stereotype claiming that in the U.S., he succeeded to make his career – from working in a grocery store to the occupation in a bank – due to the educational and professional opportunities. Besides, the political category Robert appeals to is ironically intersected with the gender category – kissing an American girl on the first date shapes his treatment of the U.S. as a democratic land of opportunities. It is also interesting that the voice of Chinese women is disregarded on the representational and political levels since they are positioned as sexually conservative objects (Crenshaw 1989). From the post-colonial perspective, Hwang also uses the subversion of the stereotype about the eroticized relationship between colonial masters and

subjects (Spencer 2006). Labeling himself as a cosmopolitan, Robert, nevertheless, blurs his ethnic background to adjust to American society ideologically, which can be placed in a political dimension of intersectionality.

Robert classifies and categorizes Chinese placing them in one depersonalized ethnic category, which, according to De Fina (2003), serves as a salient category for *self* and *other* identification for immigrants. Namely, Robert explains his failure to meet Di-Gou at the airport appealing to inefficient Chinese airlines and the specific appearance of the passengers,

ROBERT: Everyone on that plane was an old Chinese man. We went up to all these old Chinese men at the airport, asked them, “Are you our Di-gou?” They all said yes. What could we do? They all looked drunk, bums.

(Hwang 1999: 76)

The character also screens the Chinese passengers based on the intersections of age and class. However, meeting Di-Gou, Robert is enthusiastic about “showing American ways” since even though he positions himself as an assimilated member of American society, he remains within the social status of an immigrant. Based on that, Robert encourages the group-distinctive stereotypes about Asian Americans appealing to the democratic ideology,

ROBERT: Us Chinese, we love to eat, right? Well, here in America, we can be pigs! I don’t see why you can’t – ? Look. (He picks up a bao) See? (He stuffs the whole thing into his mouth) Pigs! I know. You’re not hungry. Think I’m hungry? No, sir! What do I have to do to convince you? Here. (He drops a tray of guo-tieh on the ground, begins stomping them) This is the land of plenty! Now, see, that’s your problem in the P.R.C. – lots of justice, but you don’t produce

(Hwang 1999: 82)

Notably, Robert also draws a parallel between a Chinese immigrant and an animal – a pig and refers to the category of production that also shapes the class and political understandings of identities. Thus, stepping on the food and labeling America “a land of opportunities”, the character creates stereotypes about both immigrants and the host country.

The class category also intersects with gender and generation categories: when Hannah tells Robert that they are still not able to buy a fancy house in Bel Air, he, firstly, disregards her voice and, secondly, outlines the gap between his and Di-Gou’s generation, which is not aware

of the contemporary ideological discourse, “That’s not what I mean, stupid! I mean, when we wouldn’t be able to because we’re Chinese! He [Di-Gou] doesn’t know the new America. I was making a point and you all ruined it!” (Hwang 1999: 84) The generational aspect is also highlighted in Robert’s attitude towards the cultural codes and meanings: the constitutive element of his self-determination is the story of kidnapping. In comparison with Lone, the character of the play *The Dance and the Railroad*, who considers kidnapping equal to selling him as a commodity, Robert compares the status of a victim to the status of a celebrity, and he appeals to the images from mass culture and racial stereotypes to prove that,

ROBERT: But the resulting publicity has made me a celebrity. Everyplace I go, people come up to me – Aren’t you the one that got kidnapped?” When I tell them how much the ransom was, they can hardly believe it. They ask for my autograph. Now – here’s the new thing. I met these clients last week, told them my story. Now, these guys are big shots and they say it would make a great movie. Yeah. No kidding. They made movies before. Not just regular movie, that’s junk stuffs. We want to go where the big money is – we want to make a miniseries for TV. Like *Shogun*. I told them, they should take the story, spice it up a little, you know? Add some sex scenes -we were thinking that I could have some hanky-panky with one of my kidnappers – woman, of course – just for audience sake – like Patty Hearst. I told them I should be played by Marlon Brando. And I have the greatest title: Not a Chinaman’s Chance. Isn’t that a great title? Not a Chinaman’s Chance. Beautiful. I can see the beginning already: I’m walking out of my office. I stop to help a man fixing a flat tire.

(Hwang 1999: 93)

Robert’s appeal to ransom can be categorized within the class issue since he considers it a commodity and also an attribute of whiteness – a ransom positions him in the social category of American. The idea of a movie and a TV series with reference to *Shogun* – the 1980s miniseries based on the adventures of English navigator Adams is also important. *Shogun* is a series that depicted sexuality and violence overtly, and the reception in Japan was negative due to the trivial fictionalization of the sixteenth century. Besides, Robert chooses a prototype from the mass culture – an actor Marlon Brand, thus excluding the cultural specificities of Asians or Asian Americans to satisfy social preconceptions and stereotypes.

Regarding stereotypes, Robert expresses both the yellow peril and model minority stereotypes. He refers to the sex scene comparing himself to Patty Hearst – a granddaughter of an American publishing magnate who was kidnapped by the left-wing organization and later

participated in a number of bank robberies. As Robert explains, the sex scene aims to satisfy the audience, thus supporting the preconceptions about Asian masculinity. The title of the movie, however, as well as the beginning, in which the character stops to help a man, can be placed within a model minority stereotype – due to that, Robert also frequently refers to American newspapers checking the new articles about Chinese Americans and their success. Hence, this character's identity is constructed within the racial stereotypes and in the opposition to Di-Gou's ethnic stories – Robert activates his identity through the episode of kidnapping in his childhood since kidnapping is considered by this character as an attribute of *whiteness*.

### **3.2. ABC as a Social Category**

#### **3.2.1. Dale: Exclusion of *Others* in FOB**

Dale represents an ABC category since he is a second-generation Chinese American who was born and educated in the U.S. Besides, Hwang uses this character to denote the meaning and provide a description of FOB as an *other*; Dale starts a play and wraps it up with the same description of FOB as a social category. As an ABC character, Dale is positioned based on his racial, ethnic, class, and gender stereotypes about FOBs. Specifically, he is prejudiced about male FOBs: even though Grace as his cousin can also be considered as a FOB character, Dale omits her from the discourse of *otherness* and “Chineseness”,

DALE: Grace, c'mon, that's ridiculous. You're not rich. I mean, you're not poor, but you're not rich either. I mean, you're not a FOB. FOBs are different. You've been over here most of your life. You've had time to thaw out. You've thawed out really well, and, besides – you're my cousin.

(Hwang 1999:29)

Here, he puts Grace in the same ingroup as himself based on the class issue: from his perspective, Grace and he are the representatives of the same ingroup who share common financial status unlike the rich members of the FOB group. Besides, the intersection of generation is also crucial – since Grace is an already assimilated Chinese American of the first generation, she is technically closer to Dale. Another reason for identifying Grace as an

individual belonging to the same category is the gender and sexual stereotyping of male Chinese Americans, which can be rooted in the stereotype of yellow peril and the images of threatening China that are reflected to the recent immigrants.

In the prologue Dale describes FOB males as “horny”, and this stereotype is highlighted in other passages. Observing communication between Grace and Steve, Dale points out that “Some of those FOBs get moving pretty fast” (Hwang 1999: 16) and adds that “FOBs are sneaky”, which is one of the reasons they are thoroughly checked at immigration (Hwang 1999: 32). Dale considers Steve as a possible passive threat to American Chinese females. The exclusion of Steve based on sexuality is also stressed when Dale creates a prototype, the subjective representation of Steve’s experience (Hogg et al. 1995); Dale claims that if Steve stays in the U.S., his life will be mostly determined by “a few chattering teeth and a pack of pornographic playing cards” (Hwang 1999: 21).

As for the stereotypes, Dale expresses them within several categories that stand for the description of FOBs as a social group. Namely, Dale tries to anticipate certain behavior patterns based on Steve’s knowledge of the English language and the U.S. locations and his food habits. It is demonstrated in the scene at the restaurant of Grace’s father in which the characters have lunch. When Grace tells Dale that Steve has already made a reservation, the latter predicts a choice of the FOB, “That limits the possibilities. Guess we’re going to Chinatown or something, right?” (Hwang 1999: 18). Thus, Dale determines the boundaries between racially oriented and Western places, which serves as a categorial norm (Lorde 1984). Dale’s attitude towards Steve as *other* is also outlined in the passage in which he provides a description of the possible experience of Americanization,

DALE: “Very nice.” *Good, colorful, Hong Kong English.* You feel like you’re an American? Don’t tell me. Lemme guess. You father. (*He switches into a mock Hong Kong accent*) Your fad-dah tink he sending you here so you get yo’ M.B.A., den go back and covuh da world wit’ trinkets and beads. Diversify. Franchise. Sell – ah – Hong Kong X-ray glasses at tourist shop at Buckingham Palace. You know – ah – “See da Queen”? (*Switches back to American accent*) He’s hoping your American education’s gonna create an empire of defective goods and breakable merchandise. Like those little cameras with the slides inside? I bought one at Disneyland

once and it ended up having pictures of Hong Kong in it. You know how shitty it is to expect the Magic Kingdom and wind up with the skyline of Kowloon? Part of your dad's plan, I'm sure. But you're gonna double-cross him. Coming to America, *you're gonna jump the boat*. You're gonna decide you like us. Yeah – you're gonna like having fifteen theatres in three blocks, you're gonna *like West Hollywood and Newport Beach*. You're gonna decide *to become an American*. Yeah, don't deny it – it happens to the best of us. You can't hold out – you're no different. You won't even know it's coming before it has you. Before you're trying real hard to be just like the rest of us – go dinner, go movie, go motel, bang-bang. And when your father writes you that do-it-yourself acupuncture sales are down, you'll throw that letter in the basket and burn it in your brain. An you'll write that you're gonna live in Monterey Park a few years before going back home – and you'll build *up a nice little stockbroker's business and have a few American kids* before your dad realizes what's happened and dies, his hopes reduced to a few chattering teeth and a pack of pornographic playing cards. Yeah – great things come to the U.S. out of Hong Kong.

(Hwang 1999: 21)

Dale categorizes Steve based on his language: while Steve uses language to join the ingroup, Dale switches between accents to point out Steve's *otherness*. Besides, in Steve's categorization, Dale also outlines some group-distinctive stereotypes that concern ethnic food habits. Firstly, he parodies the Asian way of eating, which is stressed by Hwang in the description of lunch, "Dale eats Chinese-style, vigorously shoveling food into his mouth" (Hwang 1999: 22). In a scene when Steve eats a dish with a hot sauce, Dale humiliates him based on the stereotypes and points out his upper status comparing to Steve who belongs to the different outgroup, "FOBs can eat anything, huh? They're specially trained. Helps maintain the characteristic greasy look. Look, Grace, he's eating that! He's amazing! A freak! What a cannibal!" (Hwang 1999: 24). Interestingly, the same stereotype related to FOB's eating habits is mentioned by Robert, a FOB character from the play *Family Devotions* who claims that the Chinese can eat everything, and the U.S. as a host country allows them to consume more. Thus, Dale also categorizes Steve based on the food consumption that can be linked to the class issue.

Moreover, Dale tries to adjust Steve as a FOB to a social category he "should belong to" using a prototype from a mass culture – John Travolta, "I'M TRYING TO HELP YOU! I'M TRYING TO MAKE YOU LIKE JOHN TRAVOLTA" (Hwang 1999: 28). Dale pushes Steve to clean the table pointing out that his Chinese ethnic norms and values are irrelevant in American society, and to fit it Steve should learn how to work. The refusal of Steve is interpreted by Dale as



the “uselessness” of the former. Another way Dale uses to represent the social category is the comparison between Steve’s ethnic background, namely life in Hong Kong, and the U.S. based on racial stereotypes and racist humiliation: he points out that there are no “shit on the sidewalks” or “armies of rice-bowl haircuts” and again appeals to the class difference of two ethnicities, “I’m not one of your servant boys that you can knock around – that you got by trading pornographic playing cards – that you probably deal out to your friends. You’re in America, understand?” (Hwang 1999: 30). Thus, racial and ethnic stereotypes towards Steve serve as evidence of Dale’s hostility and biased attitude that function as barriers to consider Steve a representative of the same social group. The same ethnic background is disregarded since, in the perception of an individual, Dale relies on his social category within American society.

However, this character also feels marginalized primarily based on class: he does not consider himself a rich member of the category but just “upper-middle”. In the play, his identity is constructed through the class stereotypes he appeals to, and his process of assimilation is outlined in his appeal to an audience,

DALE: I go out now. Lots. I can, anyway. Sometimes I don’t ask anyone, so I don’t go out. But I could. I am much better now. I have friends now. Lots. They drive Porsche Carreras. Well, one does. He has a house up in the Hollywood Hills where I can stand and look down on the lights of L.A. I guess I haven’t really been there yet. But I could easily go. I’d just have to ask. My parents – they don’t know nothing about the world, about watching Benson at the Roxy, about ordering hors d’oeuvres at Scandia’s, downshifting onto the Ventura Freeway at midnight. They’re yellow ghosts and they’ve tried to cage me up with Chinese-ness when all the time we were in America. So, I’ve had to work real hard – real hard – to be myself. To not be a Chinese, a yellow, a slant, a gook. To be just a human being, like everyone else. I’ve paid my dues. And that’s why I’m much better now. I’m making it, you know? I’m making it in America.

(Hwang 1999:27)

In this monologue, Dale describes the experience of identity construction by denying his ethnic background. The character refers to his assimilation as hard work to “become a human being” and names his parents “yellow ghosts who tried to catch him up with Chinese-ness”. Here, Dale’s racial and class prejudice towards Asians is interpreted as a desire to leave this social group, which can be interpreted based on Goldberg’s thesis (in Spencer 2006) – Dale is trying to “behave as white” to be

seen as white. For Dale, racial and economic intersections function at the same level of marginalization; for instance, he is afraid to be excluded from the Western ingroup if the characters drive Steve's car, "Getting out of a limo in the middle of Westwood? People staring, thinking we're from SC? Wouldn't you feel like dirt?" (Hwang 1999: 20). This reveals that Dale's experience of identity construction is built on the race and class intersections: to avoid marginalization, Dale chooses the behavior pattern that positions him as a "white" Westernized individual. However, at the end of the play, he is excluded from the group formed by Steve and Grace through a game, and he wraps up a play repeating the same description of FOB as in the beginning. Thus, Dale's identity as a representative of the ABC category becomes salient in the context of an ethnic-based group game: he rejects to join Steve's and Grace's mythological membership and remains within his Westernized system of values.

### **3.2.2. Wilbur: Model Minority Stereotype in *Family Devotions***

Wilbur is a Japanese American of the second generation or nisei. This character stands for the model minority stereotype as he provides financial support for the whole family, and it is claimed he has made his career in the U.S. As Healey et al. (2019) note, nisei as the second generation of Japanese Americans was more balanced and Americanized, and their American educational background, as well as broader professional opportunities, have contributed to the stereotype of the model minority. Thus, the experience of this character can be studied within the social preconceptions about American-born Japanese Americans, including generational, class, and gender categories.

Since Wilbur represents the Americanized generation, Hwang positions him in this category already at the beginning of the play by describing his appearance – Wilbur's hair is permed, and he wears tennis clothes. Perming hair serves as an attribute of assimilation as it was indicated, for instance, in the episode of Grace's hair bleaching in the play *FOB*. Besides, the

FOB characters presented in other plays often refer to hair as an indicator of whiteness pointing out the racial difference. Regarding clothing, it can be identified as one of the clusters for social divisions (Spencer 2006) and as a consumer's code that places Wilbur in American culture. With this in mind, it is worth noting that he also struggles to pronounce Di-Gou's name correctly since, for him, it sounds alien and has no cultural meaning: thus, by mechanisms of naming, Hwang outlines the generational gap between characters that intersects with ethnic category.

The central domain in Wilbur's identity is the category of class. As was mentioned, the character provides financial support for the whole family: he mentions his good education and the occupation related to computer software. Interacting with other characters, Wilbur refers to the commodities and possessions: he suggests Robert to look at his collection of tax shelters and invites Di-Gou to play tennis with a tennis machine he has bought. When the machine appears to be broken and hits both Di-Gou and Wilbur, the former claims, "Joanne! This machine's too fast. I don't pay good money to be attacked by my possessions!" (Hwang 1999: 85). Considering Wilbur within the idea of Nguyen's body politic, it can be noted that the character articulates the capitalistic ideology of the American society he belongs to. However, the stereotype of a model minority still reflects the character's perception within the play: Wilbur has won the title of Mr. Congeniality at the local club, "WILBUR (To Joanne): Honey, are you trying to advise me on how to be diplomatic? You're a real stitch, you know that? You really are. Look, who was voted "Mr. Congeniality" at the club last week – you or me?" (Hwang 1999: 89). According to Lee (1999), the model minority stereotype characterizes Asian Americans as silent and disciplined, and Healey et al. (2019) also claim that this stereotype represents the minority as friendly: thus, Wilbur's status as Mr. Congeniality places him within the frames of this social stereotype.

However, it should be noted that the character of Wilbur disregards the female voice, which is outlined in his attitude towards his wife Joanne. She claims that he never lets her talk, and Wilbur's response to this statement demonstrates his gender marginalizing, "There is nothing in your mind worth saying" (Hwang 1999: 94). On the one hand, Wilbur's attitude can be studied within the structural aspect of intersectionality and class category since his wife is financially dependent on him that makes her voice unheard; however, it is also possible to place this conflict within the ethnic intersection since Joanne is Chinese American who also immigrated in the U.S. in her childhood. Hence, Wilbur's character represents the model minority stereotype within American society; as a nisei, he combines the preconceptions about the subordinated female voice and another ethnic minority – Chinese Americans.

### **3.2.3. Jenny and Chester: Americanized Generation in *Family Devotions***

Jenny and Chester are American-born characters who stand for the youngest generation in the play: Chester is a son of Robert and Hannah, and Jenny is a daughter of Wilbur and Joanne, a half-sansei or a third-generation Japanese American. The characters are considered based on their perception of members of their family of different generations, namely FOB characters – Ama, Popo, and Di-Gou. Besides, the mechanisms of their identities construction within American society are studied within the intersections of class, gender, language, and ethnicity; the interaction of this couple as American-born characters with Di-Gou – an ethnic Chinese who distances from American culture – is explored within the intergenerational aspect.

Both Jenny and Chester are represented within the model minority concept with the focus on the career aspect. Chester has been invited to perform in the Boston Symphony as a violinist – at the beginning of the play, he is busy packing for the future trip that serves as a reason why he is not enthusiastic about meeting the old relative Di-Gou. As well as for Wilbur, both Jenny and Chester

struggle to pronounce the name of Di-Gou correctly, which outlines the difference in cultural meanings,

JENNY: They'll expect you to be here when that Chinese guy gets here. What's his name? Dar-gwo?

CHESTER: I dunno. Dah-gim?

JENNY: Doo-goo? Something.

CHESTER: Yeah. I'm not staying.

JENNY: So what else is new?

CHESTER: I don't have time.

JENNY: You luck out 'cause you don't live here. Me – there's no way I can get away. When you leaving?

CHESTER: Tomorrow.

JENNY: Tomorrow? And you're not packed?

CHESTER: Don't rub it in. Listen, you still have my green suitcase?

JENNY: Yeah. I wish I had an excuse not to be here. All I need is to meet another old relative. Another goon.

(Hwang 1999: 68)

In this dialogue, Hwang stresses the intergenerational gap based on the mechanisms of naming and the characters' desire to leave the family and abstract from religious and ethnic categories their family has created. As well as Dale, the ABC character from the play *FOB*, Jenny and Chester treat Di-Gou based on the social stereotypes about the immigrants stressing his ethnic background, which places him in the category of *otherness*. Moreover, Jenny and Chester place themselves in an outgroup within the family based on ideological and generational intersections. Another reason why Jenny feels excluded from the family is gender preconceptions: Ama and Popo judge her plans to get married in her thirties as well as to be “like Chester” – a performer and a dancer, while Jenny separates the categories of gender and career, “How to be a good mother if I have to follow my career” (Hwang 1999: 73). This limitation based on the gender category can be studied within the structural aspect of intersectionality (Crenshaw 1989), which highlights the issues of limited options in female employment causing their financial dependence on spouses. Besides, Jenny implicitly chooses a male prototype as her role model Chester – despite the high acculturation and assimilation of a generation that she represents, her voice as a female is disregarded within this ethnic community.

Within the representation of these characters, Hwang also uses a category of language. It is noted that Chester cannot read a newspaper in Chinese while Jenny is forced by Ama and Popo to

learn the language at a Chinese school. As Spencer (2006) claims, the language can be linked to a racial category: thus, projecting this category on Di-Gou in terms of his name and the language he speaks, Jenny and Chester treat him as an *other*. Besides, the identities of these characters are closely linked to cultural images and the aspects of production and consumption: for instance, Jenny compares the procedure of family devotions to disco, and it is also mentioned she reads *Vogue* – the assimilation of this character to American society is based on the cultural and consumption codes (Spencer 2006).

However, in the case of this generation, the perception of the host country is more complex, especially in comparison with FOB characters. As was mentioned before, FOB characters (for example, Robert) consider America as a land of opportunities based preferably on the class issue – an ethnic Chinese can ostensibly change the class category. Besides, for Dale and Wilbur as the representatives of the ABC group American society is also considered the organized structure they try to fit in. However, unlike Robert who tends to adjust himself to model minority stereotype and disregards the Chinese production (for instance, by calling Chinese airlines inefficient), Chester considers American production defective, “Looks like “Made in the U.S.” is gonna become synonymous with defective workmanship” (Hwang 1999: 85). When he shows his violin to Di-Gou, he points out that the instrument has no “made in U.S.” label, which makes it valuable. Thus, in terms of consumption and production codes, the character dismantles the FOB stereotype about American class superiority.

Another interesting feature these characters’ identities represent is dismantling the ethnic myths of the oldest generation – namely, both Jenny and Chester do not believe in the story of See-goh-poh, and Jenny eventually claims, “Those kinds of things happen only in China” (Hwang 1999: 73). For Chester, the prototype of See-goh-poh marginalizes other members of the family, “Oh, sure, there’re faces. But they don’t matter here. See-goh-poh’s face is the only one that has any

meaning here” (Hwang 1999: 87). Thus, Chester, firstly, considers the story of See-goh-poh as a cultural meaning that constitutes his grandmothers’ identities and secondly distances from this ethnic myth. Ironically, Chester is the only character who hears Di-Gou’s voice – he notices Di-Gou when the former first appears on stage, and his face is shown at the end of the play as well as Di-Gou’s face is demonstrated at the beginning. It is also noted that as the light dims, the shape of Chester’s face begins to change. Di-Gou and Chester impersonate each other, thus demonstrating the fluidity of identity (Dong 2010). Moreover, Chester highlights the impact of the community on a *self*, which is described in the social identity theory (Hogg et al. 1995),

CHESTER: You? All right. Here. (He turns the back of the violin toward Di-Gou, again using it like a mirror) You look. You wanna know what I see? I see the shape of your face changing. And with it, a mind, a will, as different as the face. If you stay with them, your old self will go, and in its place will come a new man, an old man, a man who’ll pray. Your face is changing, Di-Gou. Before you know it, you’ll be praying and speaking in tongues.

(Hwang 1999: 87)

Here, the character stresses the influence of the ingroup on the process of self-articulation thus constructing a hybrid identity – a *new man* and an *old man* – that represents the interconnectedness of ethnic stories, or faces, immigrants’ myths, and the host country’s codes. Thus, using the technique of characters of different generations and social groups impersonating each other, Hwang articulates the social construction of the *self* based on different categories, including ethnic background, the stereotypes about minority, and class and gender preconceptions.

## CONCLUSION

The present paper aimed at analyzing the social construction of identities in the trilogy by David Henry Hwang. The corpus included the plays *FOB*, *The Dance and the Railroad*, and *Family Devotions*. Considering the specificity of Asian American issue and the stereotypes towards minorities, as well as the peculiarities of immigrants' identities, this study was based on the intersectional approach that as an analytical tool covers different social categories that constitute the characters' identities. The plays chosen for the analysis are understudied, especially within the complex representation of both immigrants' and American-born Asians' identities, which allowed to identify the research gap. The primary approach of this analysis was to study the social constructions of identities of the characters within two groups – FOB, which stands for Fresh Off the Boat immigrants (the characters of Steve and Grace, Lone and Ma, Ama, Popo, and Di-Gou, and Robert) and ABC – American-born Chinese (the characters of Dale, Wilbur, and Jenny and Chester). However, the analysis of the main characters of the plays also identified the generational intersection that contributes to the social divisions between groups.

Since the social construction of identity is central to the research question, the paper applied the terminology of social identity theories, especially regarding the social divisions into the ingroups and outgroups, the choice of prototypes, and the formation of group-related stereotypes. In the case of Asian American minority, the two stereotypes were considered – the yellow peril and model minority stereotypes – within both historical discourse and literary tradition. The methodology used in the study was primarily developed from the core principles of the intersectional analysis originally designed by Crenshaw (1989), which considers the three dimensions of the intersectionality – the structural, political, and representational aspects. Within these facets and in regard to the racial, class, and ethnic intersections, the paper also



referred to the matrix of cultural identity described by Spencer (2006), which includes the aspects of production, consumption, regulation, and representation. The thesis also applied Spencer's (2006) approach to the notion of *otherness* category, which is applicable in terms immigrants' redefinition of their place in the host society. The additional idea was to analyze whether the experiences of the characters can be linked to the concept of cultural hybridity by Bhabha (1990) that implies the principles of interconnectedness and mixedness of both superior and inferior cultures that challenge the purity of cultures themselves.

The analysis presented appears to confirm the social construction of the *self* that becomes salient in different social contexts. Besides, different intersections, including race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, class, language, and age, constitute the identities of the immigrants and American-born Asians depending on the generation. It is discovered that FOB as a social construction, which implies the categories of gender, class, sexuality, and race, is constructed mainly by assimilated Asian American characters who refer to yellow peril stereotype that can be placed in the political and representational dimensions of the intersectionality. For example, the analysis of ABC character Dale displayed the exclusion and distortion of the experiences of immigrants within the political agendas and cultural discourse based on the cultural images that leads to the formation of the stereotypes within the minority. However, a number of stereotypes towards the immigrants are constructed and confirmed by immigrants' characters themselves as in the example of Robert in the play *Family Devotions*.

The constitutive intersection of FOB as a social construct is class category, which also differs within generations of immigrants: the first newcomers tend to consider the host country as a "land of opportunities" – either to improve their financial status like the characters of Ma and Lone in the play *The Dance and the Railroad*, or to get an American education, which is represented in the play *FOB* based on the example of Steve. FOB characters categorize the host

society based on the racial intersection – through the mythological concept of *white devils*. Notably, the female voice among this social group is disregarded – FOB women are omitted from the discourse about newcomers completely, which highlights their exclusion in the political and representational aspects of intersectionality. Another significant category in the distinction between the *self* and *other* is language: FOB characters tend to switch to the Chinese accent or language within different social contexts, and their ethnic Chinese names often serve as an indicator of their *otherness* for ABC characters. It was also discovered that different generations of FOB characters construct ethnic myths within the community; however, these myths – for instance, the battle of Fa Mu Lan and Gwang Gung in the play *FOB*, the mock Chinese opera in *The Dance and the Railroad*, and the story of the first evangelist See-goh-poh in *Family Devotions* – can be considered hybrid since they demonstrate the interconnectedness of the two cultures, both Asian and American. Besides, the cultural codes of consumption and production constitute the representation of FOB characters’ identities – for instance, the character of Robert in *Family Devotions* considers the possible Hollywood movie about himself as an attribute of *whiteness*. The FOB characters are often compared to animals by the representatives of more assimilated ethnic groups, which confirms the significance of generational category.

Regarding the ABC characters, it was also discovered that the intersection of generation contributes to the construction of characters’ identities. As an illustration, the character of Wilbur as a nisei in the play *Family Devotions* is represented within the model minority stereotype, while Dale in the *FOB* is depicted through his discrimination of FOBs based on the yellow peril stereotype. Moreover, the characters of Jenny and Chester who stand for the youngest generation of ABCs dismantle the ethnic myths within their family, namely the concept of Americans as a “land of opportunities” referring to the production codes – they treat

American production *defective*. It is also worth mentioning that both ABC and assimilated FOB characters choose the prototypes from mass American culture, thus disregarding the ethnic voice within the representational aspect of intersectionality. The political dimension of intersectionality is also highlighted in the issue of educational limitations the FOB characters refer to (Ama and Popo in *Family Devotions*), and the issue of immigrants' employment is placed within the structural dimension of intersectionality – it is represented in the experiences of Lone and Ma characters as the strikers and the female marginalization in the play *Family Devotions*. As for the stylistic devices that Hwang chooses to stress the idea of cultural interconnectedness and hybridity, the dominant ones are the usage of music – the American pop music replaces Chinese ethnic motives and the mock Chinese performances create the interpersonal realities for the characters. The impersonation demonstrated in the plays is also considered as a representation of the fluidity of identities.

The present study has limitations. Firstly, the corpus chosen is relatively small, which cannot provide the full picture of the stereotypes about different generations of immigrants; besides, the plays were written in the 1980s, so the preconceptions about later generations of Asian Americans are not reflected in the study. The analysis also does not cover the gender aspect completely due to the limited selection of female characters, and considering the significance of generation as an intersection, some of the generational experiences are not presented in the plays as well as in the analysis. Since the representation of generations in the plays is complex, the methodology should be expanded focusing on intergenerational conflicts. Further research will allow applying the concept of cultural hybridity to study the reasons for the exclusion of the characters' experiences and the stylistic devices, including characters' impersonation and the subplots Hwang uses to present the cultural interconnectedness on stage.

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## RESÜMEE

TARTU ÜLIKOOL  
ANGLISTIKA OSAKOND

**Yaroslava Rychyk**

**The social construction of the characters' identities in the trilogy by David Henry Hwang:  
An intersectional approach**

**Tegelaste identiteedi sotsiaalne konstruksioon David Henry Hwangi triloogias:  
Interseksionaalne uurimus**

(magistritöö)

2021

Lehekülgede arv: 75

Annotatsioon:

Magistritöö analüüsib karakterite identiteetide sotsiaalset ehitust Ameerika-Hiina näitekirjaniku David Henry Hwangi näidendite triloogias: *FOB*, *The Dance and the Railroad* ning *Family Devotions*.

Töö peamine eesmärk on uurida kuidas erinevad ning kuidas arenevad tegelaste identiteedid mis põhinevad erinevatel sotsiaalsetel kategooriatel nagu näiteks rass, rahvus, sugu, klass, seksuaalsus, põlvkond ja keel. Magistritöös kasutatud interseksionaalne ehk ristlõikeline lähenemine pakub nende kategooriate ulatuslikku analüüsi ning arutelu rahvusvähemuste eluolu kujutamise üle Hwangi näidendites.

Sissejuhatuses tutvustatakse Hwangi näidendeid varasemate uuringute põhjal ning kirjeldatakse töö uurimisfookust. Esimeses peatükis tuuakse välja identiteedi kujutamisega seotud problemaatika: binaarsed opositsioonid postkolonialistlikust vaatevinklist, kultuurilise hübriidsuse mõiste ja kultuurilise identiteedi maatriks. Peatükis antakse ülevaade ka Aasia-Ameerika probleemidest ja stereotüüpidest ajaloolises kontekstis ning Aasia-Ameerika kirjandustraditsioonidest USA-s.

Teises peatükis uuritakse tegelaste identiteetide kujutamist Whangi triloogias lähtudes kahest sotsiaalsest rühmast: FOB (Fresh Off the Boat immigrandid) ja ABC (Ameerika päritolu hiinlased) keskendudes immigrantide identiteedi kujunemise ning põlvkondade vaheliste konfliktide kujutamisele.

Lõputöö kokkuvõttes on välja toodud uuringu peamised järeldused ning arutletud antud teema üle edasiste uuringute kontekstis.

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